The #1 Computer Game Magazine

Computer Gaming World

ZD

OCTOBER 1996
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First Look!
Privateer 2
page 244

INTERNET ATTACK!



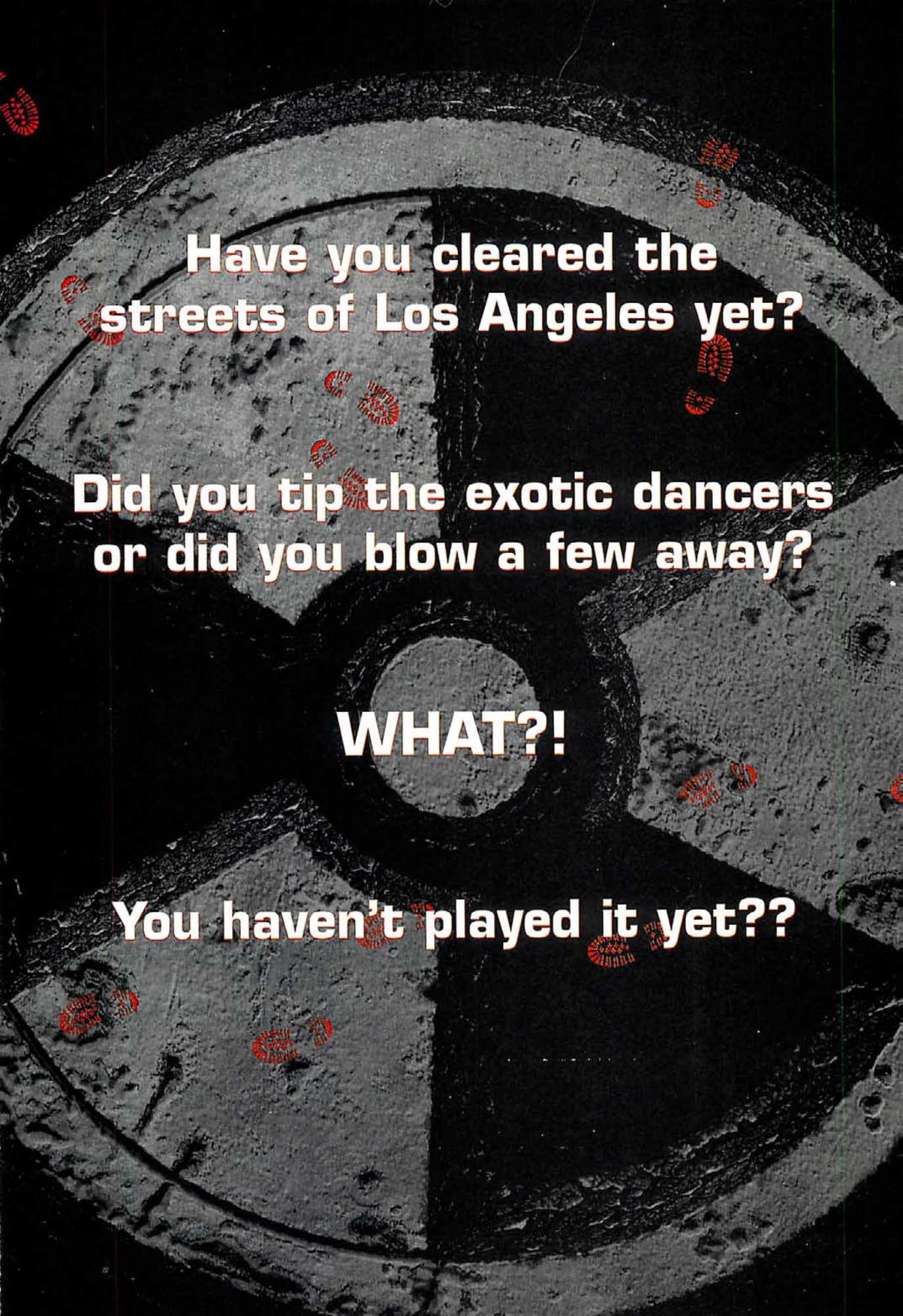
77 Great Net Games

The Fastest Modems

The Best Game Nets

WarCraft II
Dark Portal Tactics

7 Badass Fighting Games


Have you cleared the streets of Los Angeles yet?
Did you tip the exotic dancers or did you blow a few away?
WHAT?!
You haven't played it yet??

WHY IS DUKE NUKEM 3D THE BEST?

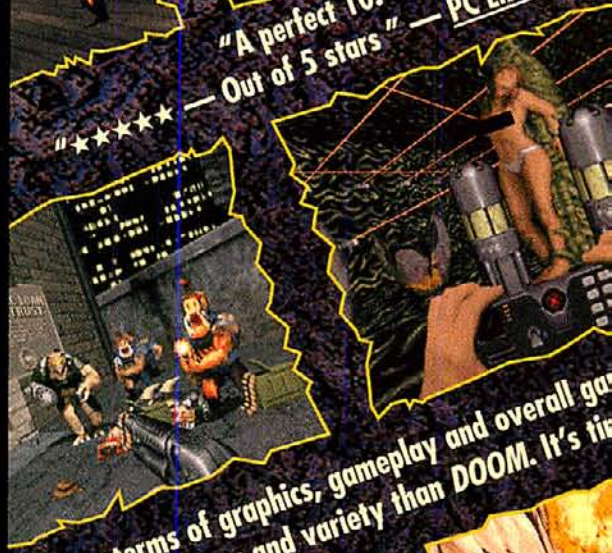
"Even running in super crisp 800x600 SVGA it blasts along faster than every other comparable 3D PC title. It's not pure speed at the expense of versatility either - it is possible to look up, down, or sideways at any time, with the bitmapped scenery undergoing minimal deformation and no speed loss whatsoever. The engine also caters for full interaction, so bullets leave pock marks on walls, enemy's blood drips down crates and earthquakes cause huge sections to shift altogether, thereby granting access to new locations. It all contributes to the feeling of being encased within a grim world as opposed to wandering through impregnable, static corridors. The effect is hugely rewarding and is surely the direction in which such games should be heading.

This potential has luckily been exploited too. So often games fail to capitalize on excellent technologies but each of **Duke Nukem's** levels are noticeably different, being packed with huge ramps, drops, lifts, jumps and cunningly hidden secret areas. None look the same (indeed there is often a significant variation within a single building) and there is always a feeling that there is a new trick round the next corner. ***— Edge Magazine***"



"A perfect 10!" — Computer Playe

"★★★★★" — Out of 5 stars" — PC Entertainme



"In terms of graphics, gameplay and overall ga more strategy and variety than DOOM. It's tir



"The most astonishing game we've laid our eye on for ages!" — PC Gam



"Duke is armed to the hilt and ready to rumble." — Computer Game Revie



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Mature Players: Violence and Adult themes

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Well, what are you waiting for?

WINNER OF "GAME OF SHOW"
ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPO E3 LOS ANGELES '96

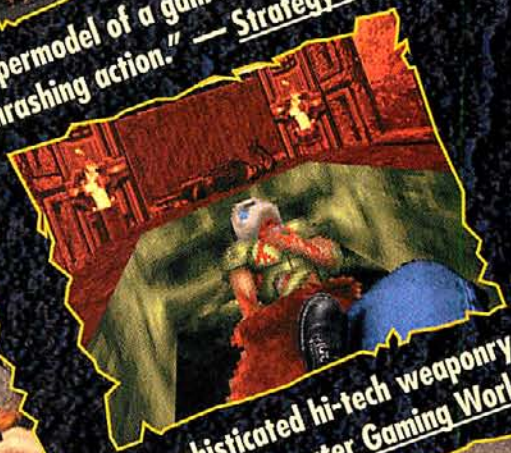
e design, Duke is better than DOOM. The modem/network play is far better and allows
e to make way for the Duke." — Computer Player

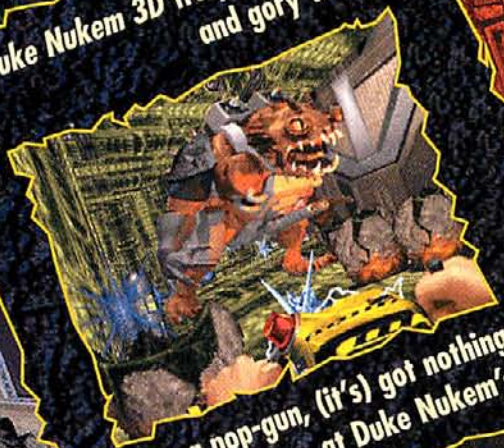






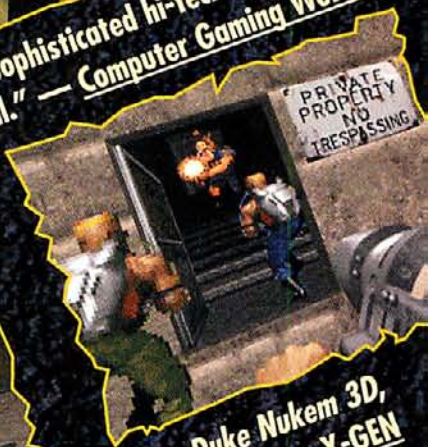
"Duke Nukem 3D truly looks like a 3D supermodel of a game: sleek, sexy, and gory with lead-thrashing action." — Strategy Plus





"The BFG was a pop-gun, (it's) got nothing on the sophisticated hi-tech weaponry at Duke Nukem's disposal." — Computer Gaming World







"DOOM is DEAD — long live Duke Nukem 3D, could this be the greatest PC shoot'em-up ever?" — X-GEN

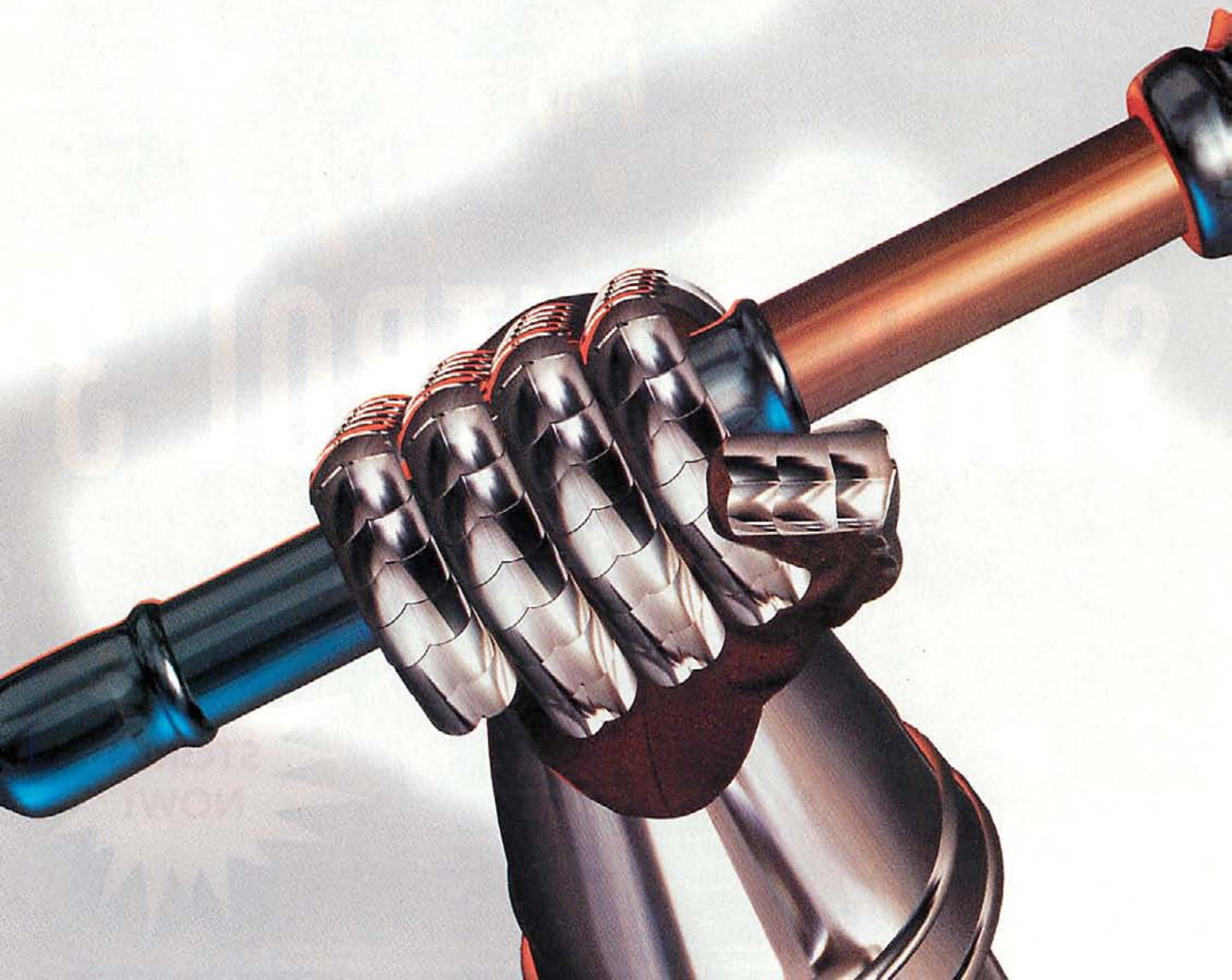


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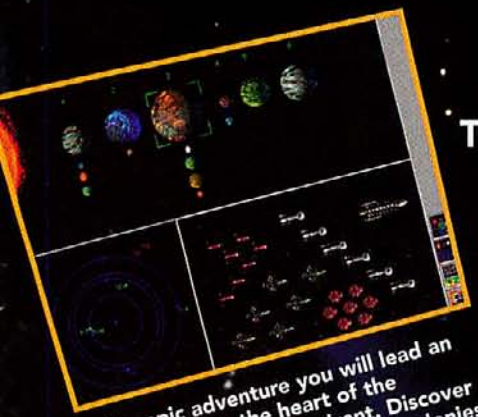
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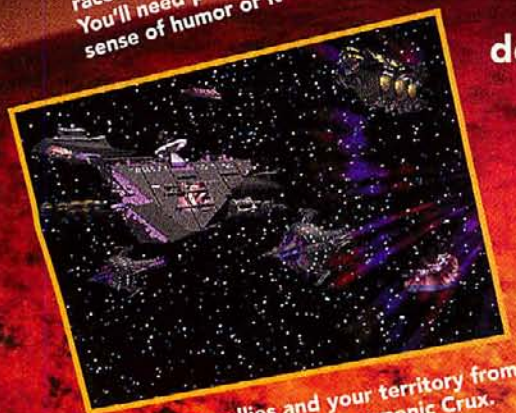
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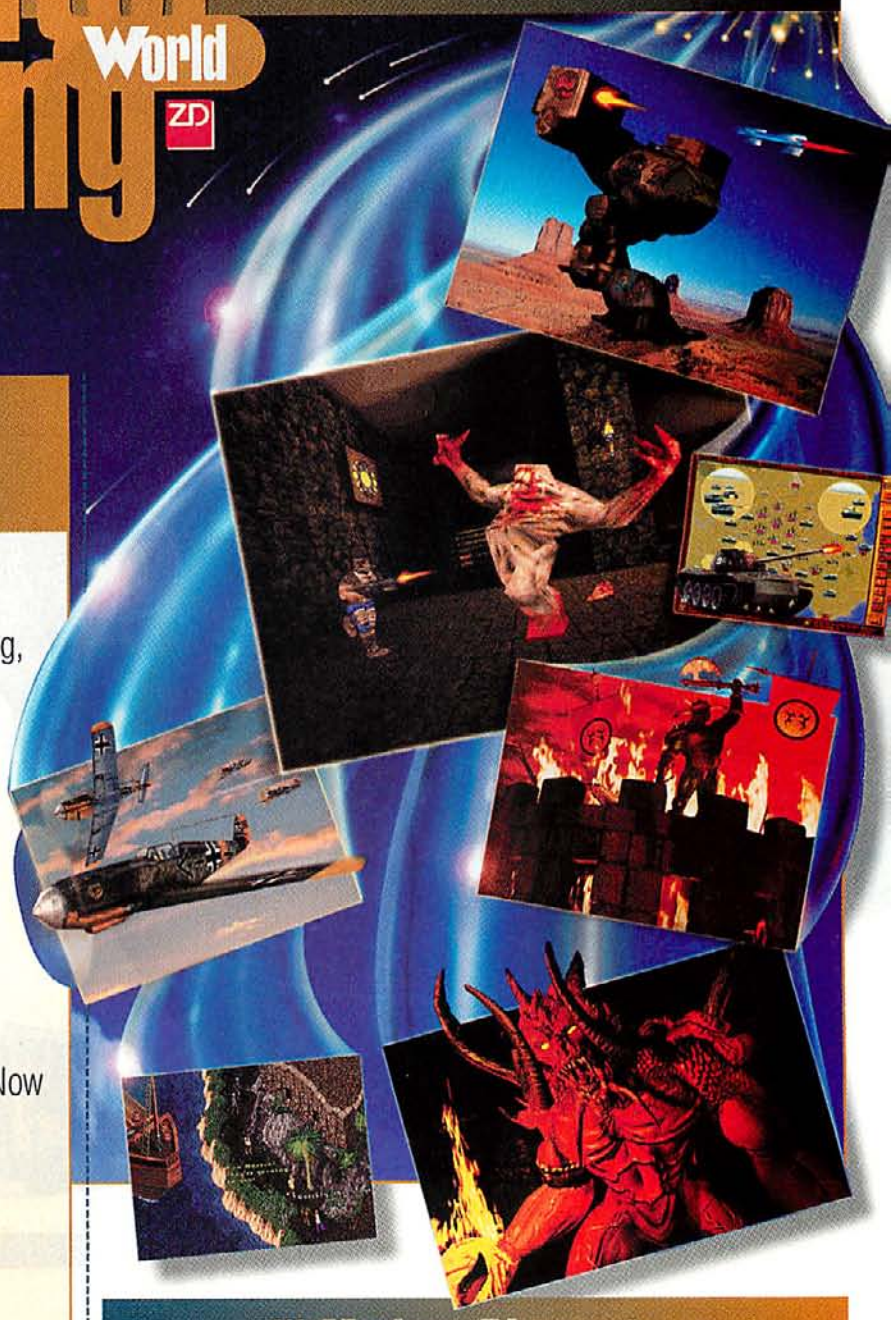
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FEATURES



57 Cover Story: **Internet Attack!**

Everyone's yapping about online multiplayer gaming, but does anyone know what they're talking about? You've read the hype—now read the real deal. In this issue, *CGW* brings you everything you ever wanted to know about Internet gaming, genre by genre.

60 Online Games: The Time Is Now
72 Online Gaming Resources
75 Adventure/RPG Games
81 Action Games
88 Classics/Puzzles
90 Sports Games
93 Simulations
96 Strategy/War Games
106 Play-By-Email Games
108 Online Tools

111 Modem Blowout

Whether you're just getting into online gaming or you want to improve your gaming experience, you'll need to know which modem to buy. *CGW* Technical Editor Dave Salvator has been locked in his secret laboratory for a month and nearly blew a gasket (so you won't have to) in a crazed search for game-friendly modems.

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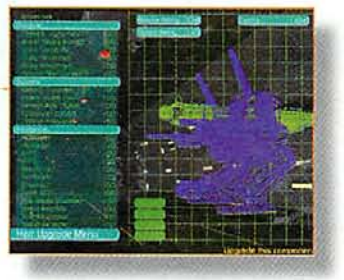


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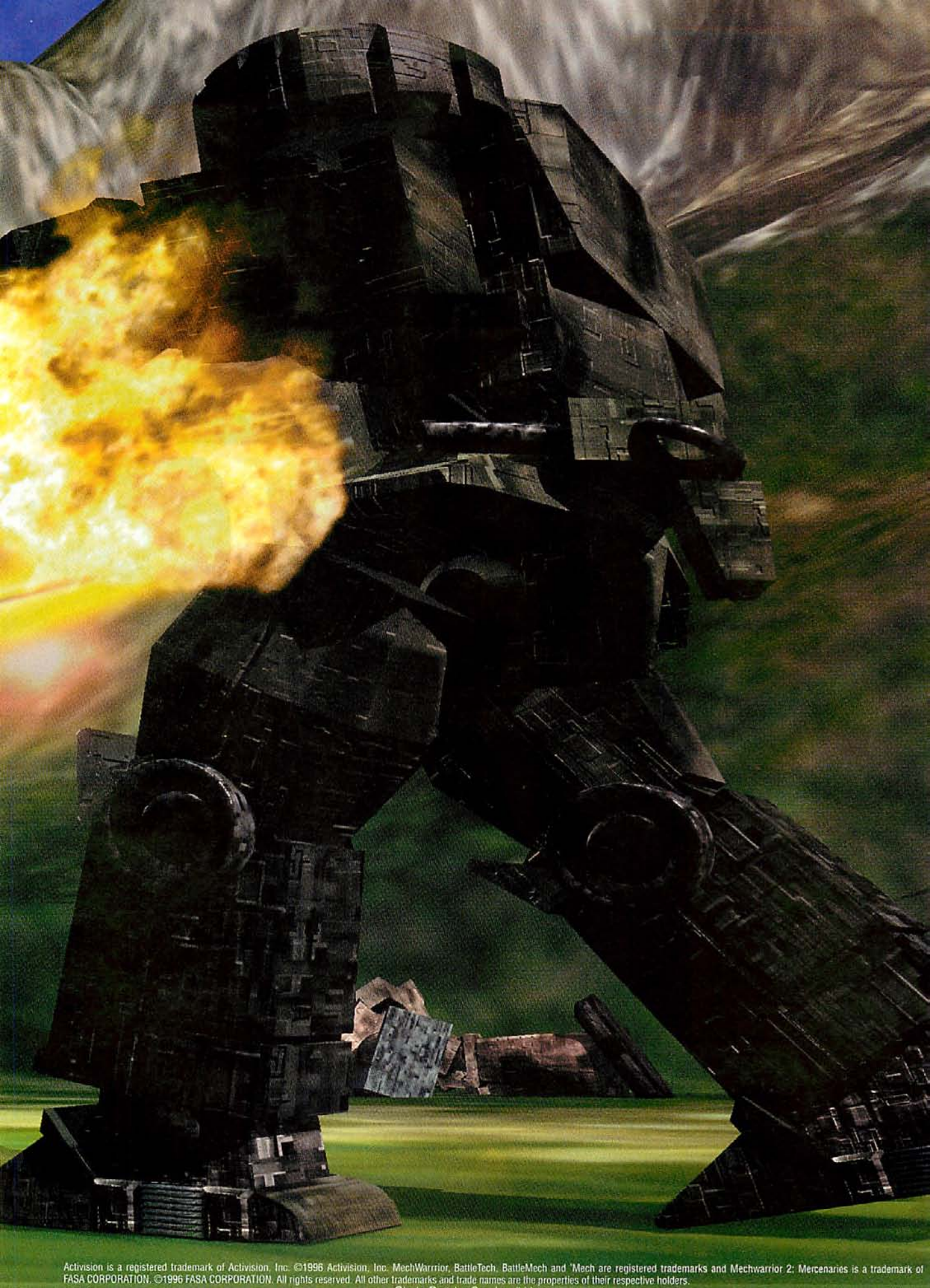
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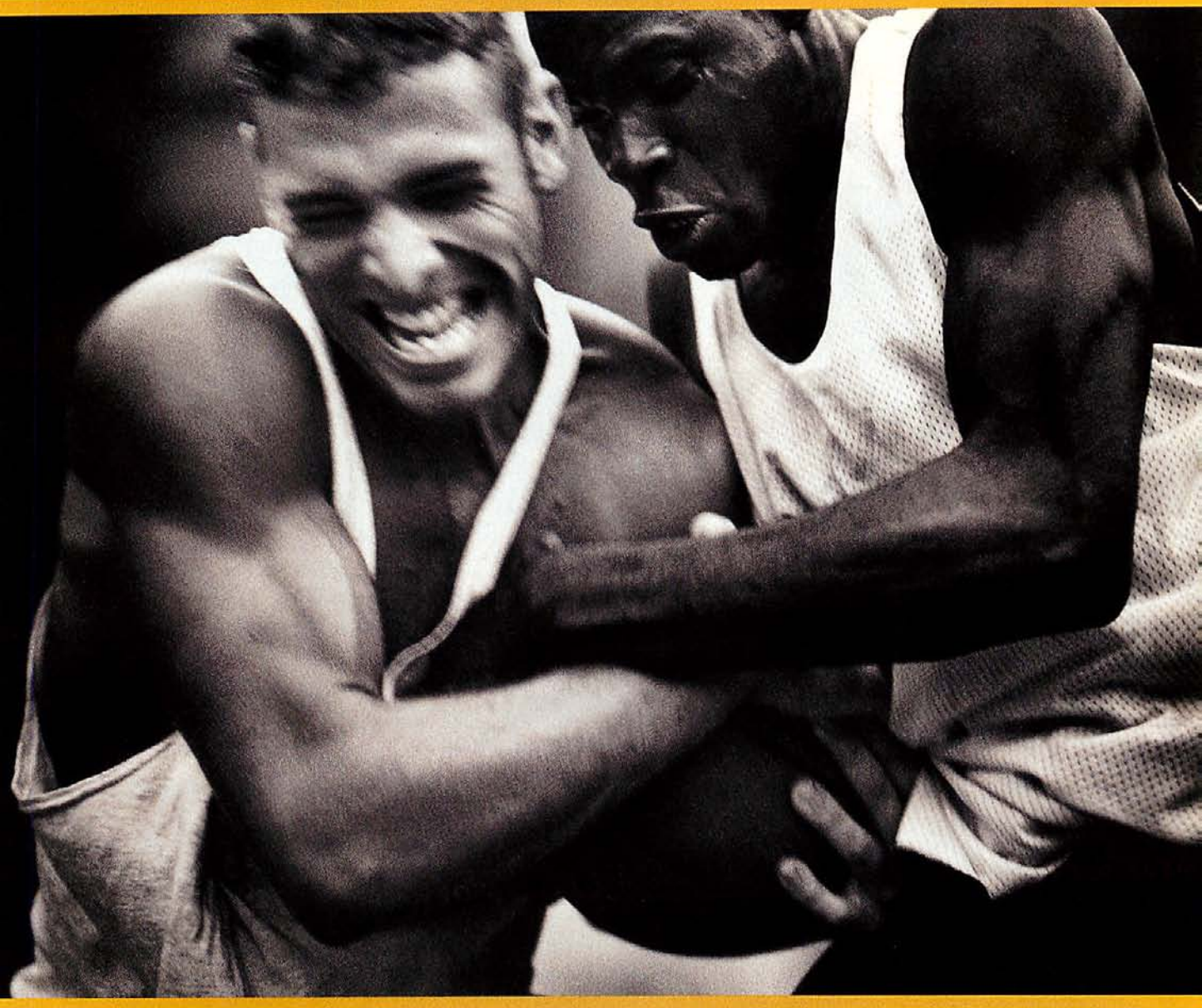


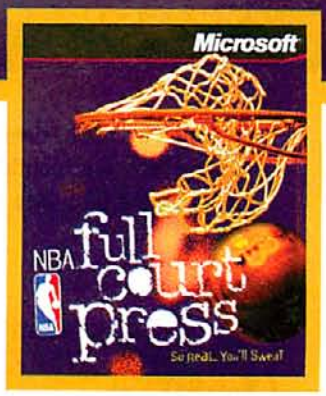
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You've always been a tad

TOO COMPETITIVE AT HOOPS.

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JUST THE FAQS

What's on the business end of my laser this month? What's going on on the *CGW* Web site? And now that I've read this issue three times and I'm bored with it, what are you guys gonna do next month?

What's On The CD?

Start your modems! This month's CD takes you to the exploding world of online gaming, where you can pick on someone your own size. The *CGW* CG-ROM has everything you'll need to sign up and log onto Internet gaming. Play WarCraft and Terminal Velocity on Mpath's gaming service, Mplayer. Or use the Mplayer enablers to play your registered versions of MechWarrior 2 and Command and Conquer. You say you wanna "Rip 'em a new one"? The Total Entertainment Network's (TEN) multiplayer Duke Nukem 3D is hot! If rocket launchers just ain't big enough, saddle up and strap in to Kesmai's Battle Tech Solaris and Interactive Broadcasting's Iron Wolves; both of which were created exclusively for online gaming. Or if you have a taste for adventure, visit the fantasy role-playing Kingdom of Drakkar on MPG Net.

Once you've tuned in, signed up and logged on, check out *CGW*'s Gamers' Guide To The Internet for easy access to game companies' home pages, press releases, and product patches. Just start your Internet browser and access our HTML-coded URLs (D:\TXT\INDEX.HTM). All you need are a valid credit card and an Internet account, and you're ready to rock.



Don't worry, we didn't leave out the game demos. Experience the early battles of World War II up close and personal in Microsoft's Close Combat. Try out Accolade's great-looking planetary conquest game Deadlock. Travel through time to set things right in Activision's Time Commando. Or, if a day on the green sounds leisurely and inviting, you haven't tried Virgin Interactive's Caddy Hack. Well, now's your chance....

How Do I Use It?

Our CD is a Windows program. If you have Windows 95, installation is simple: The CD is Autoplay enabled–just lock-n-load. Otherwise, from Windows 3.x, pop the CD into your drive, select Run from the Program Manager menu, and type "D:\RUN-ME" (where D is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) to run it straight from the CD. Then type "D:\INSTALL" to create a *CGW* program group on your Windows desktop. If you have installed previous versions of the CG-ROM, this disc will use the program group already on your desktop. Point and click to navigate around the CD just as you would any other Windows program. You can access any of the regular items (such as product demos or patches) simply by clicking on the corresponding button.

How Do I Play The Demos?

To view the demos, first click on Editors' Hot Picks or Product Demos. Next, click on your favorite genre: Action, Adventure, Classic, Strategy or Wargames. Then click on your title of interest. Each demo has its own instructions for installation.

How Do I Get The Patch Files?

Click on Patches under the *CGW* Features, and then read the text window, which has instructions on copying the files to your hard drive. You can also access the patches from a DOS prompt by typing "D:\PATCHES" (where D: is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) and copying them directly

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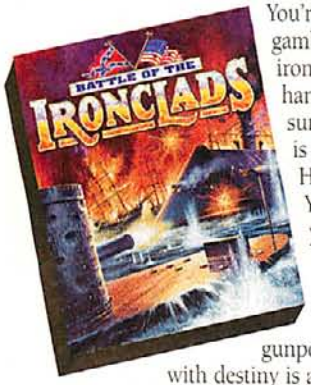
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How Do I Get The CG-ROM?

Newsstand issues come in two flavors: with and without the CD. Each type is clearly marked. If you can't find the version you want in the store you frequent, encourage your retailer to carry it (or subscribe to ensure that you get a CD every month). To subscribe, simply call (303) 665-8930, and specify that you want the CD-ROM version.

How Do We Classify Games?

Action/Arcade (AC): The emphasis is on hand-eye coordination and reflexes, usually emphasizing fast play over story or strategy.

Adventure (AD): Games wherein you control an alter ego and move through a storyline or sequence of events, where puzzle-solving takes precedence over conversation and combat.

Classics/Puzzles (CP): Classics are old stand-bys and parlor games that appeal to many different types of gamer. Examples include: backgammon, bridge, chess, MONOPOLY, parchesi, RISK, and SOLITAIRE. Puzzle games are computer games which emphasize spatial relationships, word games and/or problem-solving without requiring gamers to follow a storyline. Examples would be: SHANGHAI, TETRIS and ZIG-ZAG.

Role-Playing (RP): RPGs are a subset of adventure games, but stress character development, often through improving stats or other attributes. Conversations with non-player characters (NPCs) and tactical combat are generally more important than in Adventure games. Finally, the game world tends to be large, and the plot less linear, often with some quests/treks outside the main storyline.

Simulations (SI): Highly realistic games from a first-person perspective: you may drive a realistically simulated race car, fly a military aircraft with a meticulous physics model, or swoop through a detailed sci-fi environment. Usually polygon-filled technology is used to build the simulated world on the fly.

Sports (SP): The sports game category is a broad genre which includes action (NBA Live) and strategy games (FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO) based on sports.

Strategy (ST): Problem-solving, short- and long-range planning are the keys here. These games almost always emphasize resource and risk management. This genre includes conflict-based sci-fi and fantasy games (X-COM, OUTPOST, MOO), as well as "pure" strategy games and "software toys" such as SIMCITY.

Wargames (WG): A subset of strategy games, these recreate historical conflicts from a command perspective. They may be tactical, operational, or strategic, and stress anything from logistics and firepower to morale and leadership. They may be simple (PANZER GENERAL, EMPIRE II) to incredibly detailed and complex (PACIFIC WAR).

HOW DO WE RATE?



Outstanding: The rare game that gets it all right. The graphics, sound, and gameplay come together to form a Transcendent Gaming Experience. Our strongest buying recommendation.



Very Good: A high-quality game that succeeds in many areas. May have minor problems, but is still worth your money, especially if you're interested in the subject matter or genre.



Average: A mixed bag. Can be a game that reaches for the stars, but falls short in several ways. Can also be a game that does what it does well, but lacks flair or originality.



Weak: A game with serious problems. Usually buggy, seriously lacking in play value, or just a poorly-conceived game design—you should think long and hard before buying it.



Abysmal: The rare game that gets it all wrong. This is reserved for those products so buggy, ill-conceived or valueless that you wonder why they were ever released in the first place.

What Is Your Reviews Policy?

1) We only review from the final copy of the game. Though it has become popular among PC gaming magazines to review from late beta copies, we feel that the reader is best served by having the reviewer look at the same copy of a game that the readers will find on the shelves. While we recognize that this causes some delay in coverage, we believe the reader is better served by such caution.

2) We expect our reviewers to finish the game. We want our readers to be assured that we do not review based on immediate or early impressions of a game. Our reviewers give a game ample opportunity to show its quality. In some cases, bugs make it impossible to finish a game, but we identify situations where that has occurred.

3) We make every effort to match

A COMMENDABLE EFFORT.

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BUNGIE introduces **MARATHON 2: DURANDAL**, the highly addictive game for Windows 95 that gives you a variety of ways to kill back-stabbing co-workers and shallow friends. Wielding a tasty arsenal of weapons, you'll enjoy 27 cooperative levels of Marathon plus 13 levels designed just for network carnage, such as Kill The Man With The Ball and King Of The Hill. **WIRED MAGAZINE** says: "Marathon comes on like a relentless fuel-injected nightmare." When you find yourself sitting in a puddle of your own bodily fluids unable to move or speak, you'll probably agree. **MARATHON 2: DURANDAL. HOW WILL IT RUIN YOUR LIFE?™**

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MARATHON 2 DURANDAL

Circle Reader Service #75

the reviewer to the game. We take into consideration the preferences, background and possible biases of the reviewer and, where possible, we find people with actual life experience or special backgrounds that match a game. We believe this policy enhances both the credibility of the review and the enjoyment of gameplay when the real world and the game world are competently compared.

4) We do not accept free travel from software or hardware companies. We believe such gifts have a tacit assumption of coverage attached to them. We will only cover such events/launches as we believe will benefit our readers.

What's Up Online?

CGW Strategy Editor Elliott Chin battles his way through the first three scenarios of the WarCraft II Expansion disk from the human perspective. Detailed walk-throughs and play tips will have you well on your way to victory. Plus, download our custom scenarios and see if you can deal with an Orc invasion.

Johnny Wilson wraps up his LucasArts Series in his AOL column, "The Insider," offering his perspective on the company's history, and predictions of what's to come. Next, he'll dive into Kesmai's online submarine sim, Harpoon Online, and begin his hunt for Red October while traversing the deep sea of online gaming sims. When he surfaces, he'll weild a mighty sword in his quest for adventure. Join us as he previews Daggerfall, Bethesda's much-anticipated title in the Elder Scrolls series.



Coming Next Month

CGW celebrates 15 years of unparalleled computer game coverage. We'll have something for every gamer in this issue:

Highlights of the last 15 years of computer gaming.

The 150 best and 50 worst games of all time.



Fifteen lists of:

- The funniest games
- The best game heroes
- The nastiest villains
- The most innovative games
- The games with the dumbest back-stories

And 10 more lists that the publisher doesn't want you to know, yet. Check out the CD next month for the top 15 games our readers would most want to see.

Also next month, former *OMNI* Editor-in-Chief and gaming veteran Keith Ferrell will launch into the future to predict what the next 15 years in computer gaming might bring to a PC near you.

As always, *CGW* promises an issue packed with reviews, previews, and strategies to help you stay on top of your game. We'll have a full review of The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall, Bethesda's sequel to The Elder Scrolls: Arena. For all you racing sim fans, *CGW* contributor Gordon Goble will jump behind the wheel of NASCAR 2, by Sierra Online, to burn a few laps. All you wannabe pilots eager to master a real flight simulator's control panel, be sure to read Robin Kim's strategy guide for Back to Baghdad, so you too, can find your way home.

America Online
keyword: CGW

ZDNet
http://www.zdnet.com/gaming

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE HERE?

Here's how the breakdown of command works at *CGW*.

NAME	TITLE	JOB DESCRIPTION	DIRTY SECRET
Johnny L. Wilson	Editor in Chief	Grand omnipotent stomper	Wino
Ken Brown	Managing Editor	Scheduling, scheming, copyediting	Whiner
Denny Atkin	Features Editor	Features, flight/space sims	Guccione refugee, Amiga apologist
Terry Coleman	Reviews Editor	Classics, puzzles, devil's advocate	Has "Martyr Man" cape
Dave Salvator	Technical Editor	Hardware, technology (duh)	Francophile
Jill Anderson	News Editor/CG-ROM	News, disc-o queen	—CENSORED—
Jeff Green	Associate Editor	Sports and adventure/RPG	Mac apologist
Kate Hedstrom	Online Editor	AOL, Web content and design	Porn historian
Elliott Chin	Assistant Editor	Action/strategy games	Sega apologist
Charlotte Panther	Editorial Assistant	She who must be obeyed	Anglophile

Disclosure

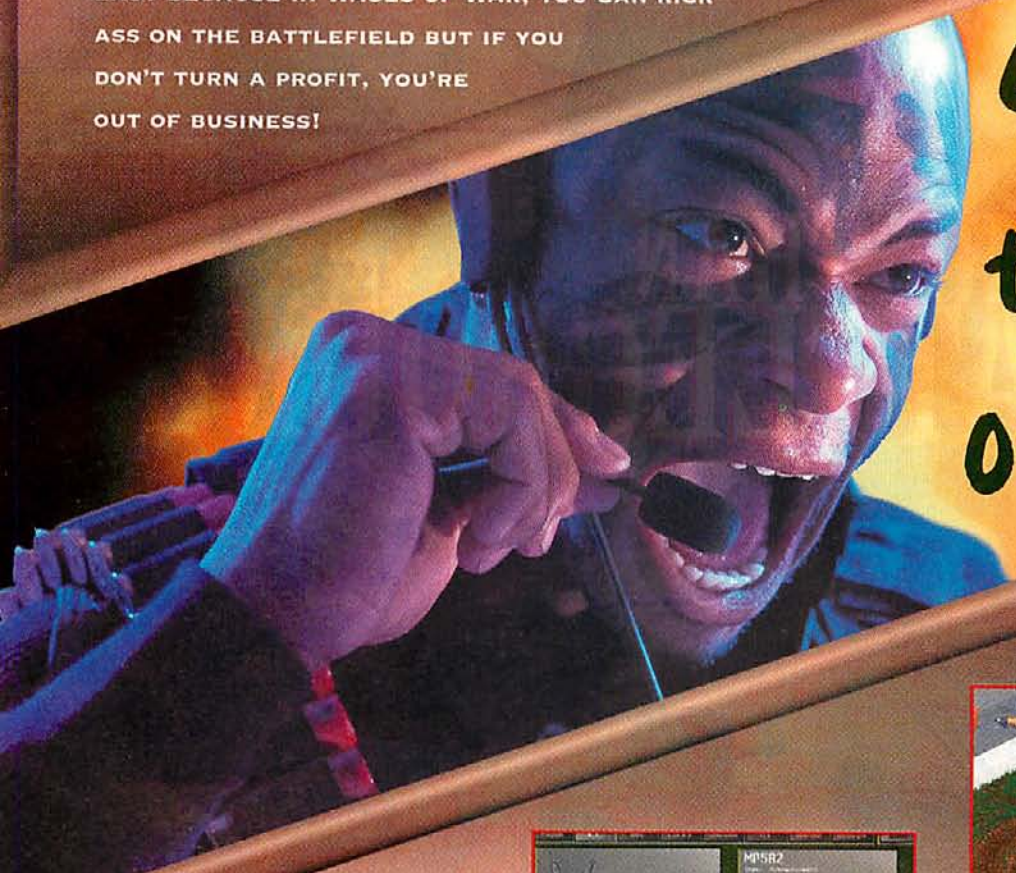
As a matter of record, *CGW* voluntarily maintains a list of companies in which SoftBank, the parent company of Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., has an interest. It is available online at http://www.zdnet.com/gaming/disclaim.html and is updated when we become aware of such investments.

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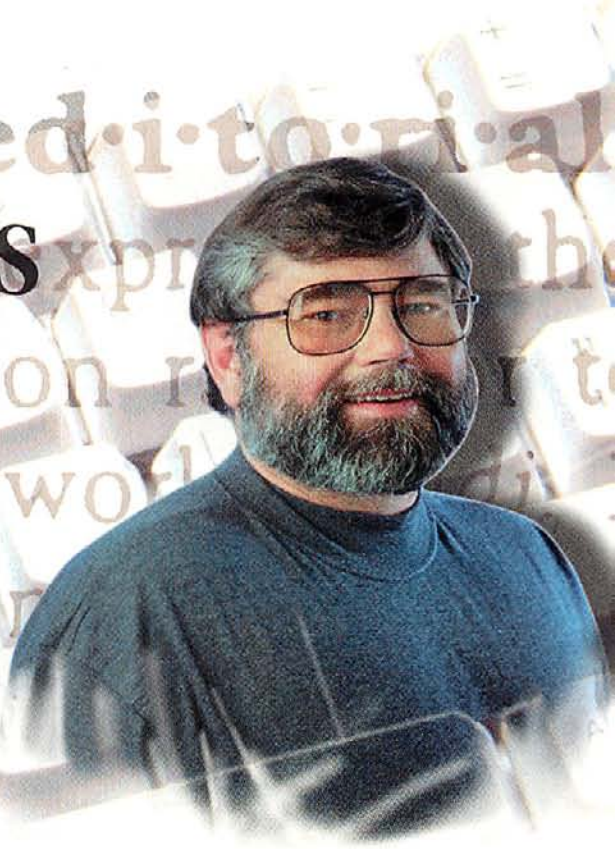
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software etc

Circle Reader Service #143

The Emperor's New Code

Hope And Hype On The Internet



The danger in magazine journalism is that it's easy to become obsessed with the hype that potentially sells magazines and drives advertising pages instead of remaining focused on the needs of your readers. In the world of computer journalism, this is particularly difficult. Journalists who fail to perceive the magic in the latest round of technological "advancements" are quickly labeled Luddites and has-beens. In a business where the product cycle keeps getting shorter and shorter, it's dangerous to ask philosophical questions like "Why?" and pragmatic questions like "What is it good for?"

Take CD-ROM, for instance. I was an early advocate of the medium. After watching game boxes swell and 3.5-inch floppy disks proliferate in those same boxes even after their data was compressed to the max, I championed this storage medium ont he basis that it would: save publishers money (sometimes several dollars per package in cost of goods, permit longer and better soundtracks, reduce software piracy, provide space for increased use of video, ease installation, reduce the size of software packages to save both natural resources and shelf space, and, hopefully, provide savings for consumers in the long run. So much for prophecy. If customers have saved money, it's only in that prices have not increased at the rate of inflation. CD-ROMs haven't reduced box sizes or increased the amount of available shelf space. Publishers have spent any savings they might have gained on cost of goods with increased budgets and new technology that is now threatening the previous reductions in software piracy.

We could establish similar report cards for our hopes in construction kits (the availability of editors has not really facilitated the onset of incredible creativity among gamers with its corollary free exchange of new games and scenarios over the Internet), connectivity (see Martin Cirulis's "What's The Deal?" in this issue), or Windows 95 (why doesn't Direct Play support play by null modem? why do you need the configuration trick covered in Loyd Case's column?). They were all supposed to make things better for us. If we were *reviewing* these trends and technologies on the *CGW* scale, we'd have to give them three stars. They may have reached high, but they didn't reach their potential.

NET RESULTS

With regard to gaming on the Internet, let me simply say that the emperor has new code. Can't you see it? Internet gaming will create global community. Don't pay any attention to the little boy in the crowd asking how wasting each other in deathmatches is going to lead to global understanding. Don't pay any attention to the little girl who's saying that building community requires communication and interaction that's more complex than running, spinning, ducking and pulling a trigger. Yet, with language barriers, limits to sound over data technology, bandwidth issues and lowest-common-denominator design, what can we expect.

> **"If the gaming experience isn't good, Internet gaming could die out faster than the Hula Hoop."**

The emperor's new code flourishes a wonderful promise of new gamers. Notice the color depth, the wide palette of choices. Ignore the rabble who keep muttering something about "multimedia." Yes, I know multimedia was supposed to bring in entire new waves of gamers, but it bogged down in software that was as interesting as playing SIMCESSPOOL or EL-DUST BUNNY. We called it "multimediocre" and "interinactive" software, because it didn't really *do* anything. So do you think the poor suckers who purchase or "rent to buy" those $500 Internet boxes or those televisions with built-in Web browsers are going to be any happier with the first-generation games that their substandard processors are going to allow them to play? They might be able to play Concentration and Tic Tac Toe with their fellow subscribers to cable television or telephone-based Internet providers. They *might*, and this is by no means certain, be able to get a keyboard so that they could play some of the Play-By-Electronic-Mail games described in the latter part of this month's feature, but they're certain not going to be able to play full 3D texture-mapped versions of NASCAR RACING II, any multiplayer equivalents to THE ELDER SCROLLS:



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DAGGERFALL that might become available, real-time FRONT PAGE SPORTS: PRO FOOTBALL, or next year's successor to QUAKE. The new gamers are going to feel robbed.

Of course, my wise readers can smirk and claim that it doesn't really matter to them. They can point to their hot rod machines and state-of-the-art connections to the Internet and say that it doesn't affect them. The trouble is that it does. It will affect them because many big publishers and service providers are going to open up gaming services with flat-rate pricing. The game hogs, reduced from paying hundreds of dollars per month for their virtual lives on traditional online services, will suddenly be able to stay online all the time for under a hundred dollars per month, and possibly under fifty dollars. Their increased efficiency at the games will enable them to run rough-shod over new players and rule their favorite games with an iron fist. They'll make life miserable for new players, and they'll clog up the pipe so that it's hard to stay connected, much less get an efficient frame rate. If the gaming experience isn't good, Internet gaming could die out faster than the Hula Hoop fad in the '50s.

My wise readers should also pay attention to the idea of the Internet as a publishing platform. It is becoming so, for better or worse, because of two factors: investment dollars and profit potential. Investors and vulture capitalists alike want to reach those millions of potential customers who are not yet gamers. The Internet represents a new chance to reach them. Publishers and new startups will focus disproportionate energy on Internet games compared to what they will spend on improving their core products. This means that my wise readers just might find themselves and their hot rod machines in the same computer morgue as the Apple II, the C-64, the TRS-80, the Atari ST, the Amiga, and probably, before you know it—the Macintosh. Just as the computers in this '80s-era morgue were superceded by the IBM platform in spite of their superior sound, graphics, resolution, 3D handling and speed, the bandwidth-challenged Internet just might take us all back to square one.

What can you do to keep from being reduced to lowest-common-denominator games? First, do your research. Find out what games you like (or could potentially like with a few changes) and reward the providers of those games with your business. Then, start communicating with the developers and the services, if applicable, that carry those games. Ask for changes to improve the games and become a missionary in recruiting new gamers into those games. Second, pay attention to the companies in your area that are investing in the Internet. If you have a progressive cable television company like TCI or Viacom, urge them not to make the same mistake they made with the Sega Channel. Write them about good online games and explain what interactivity is all about. Third, always register your packaged software and fill out the questionnaires—even if you've purchased software from that publisher before. They may not send you anything in return, but they tabulate those questionnaires and heed those demographics as they plan for future products. This way, you force publishers to stay up to date with you. Finally, answer magazine and publisher surveys about computer games. Honest answers may pave the way for product decisions you'll appreciate.

If you follow these steps, you could keep us all from being offended by the emperor's new code.

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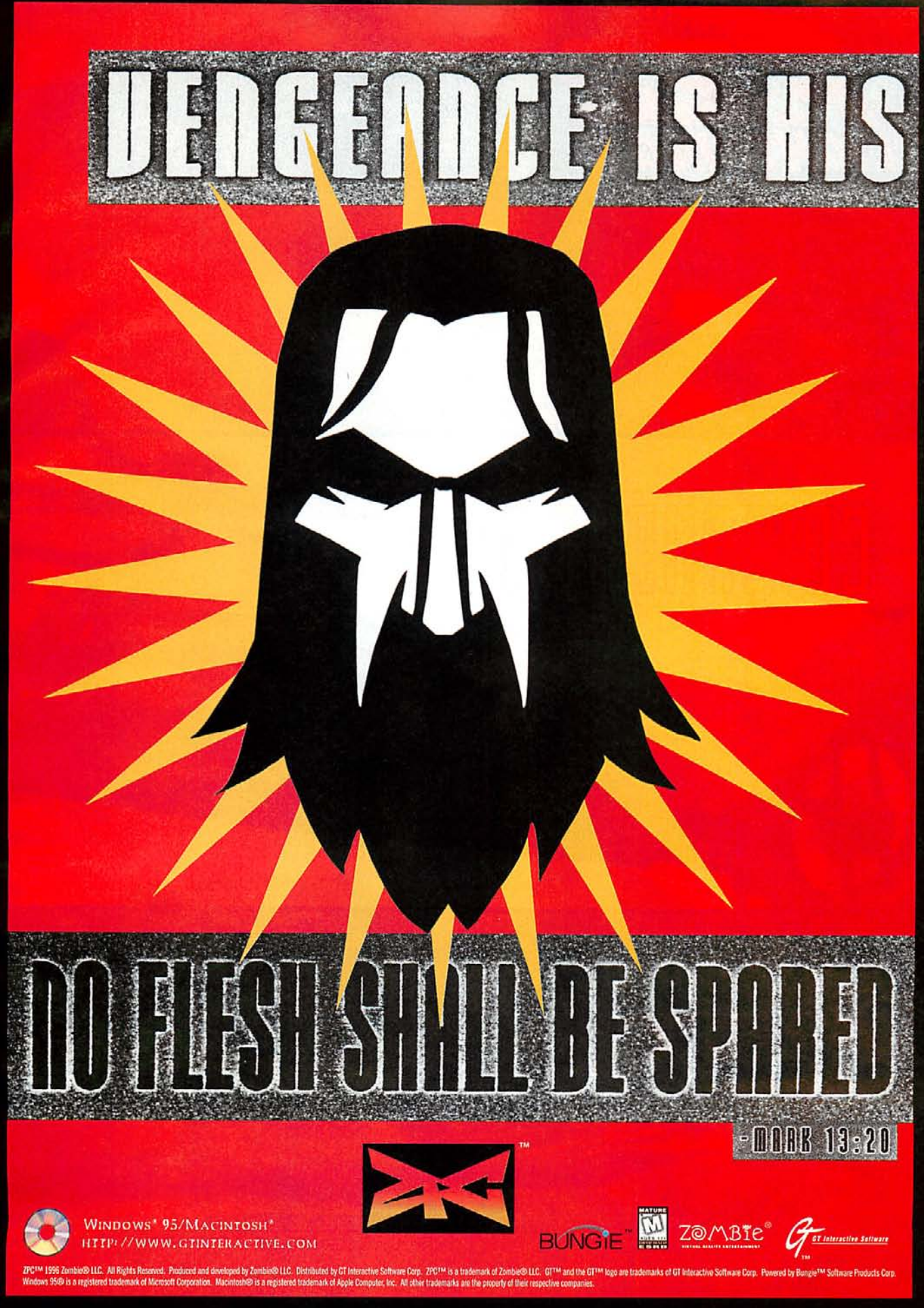
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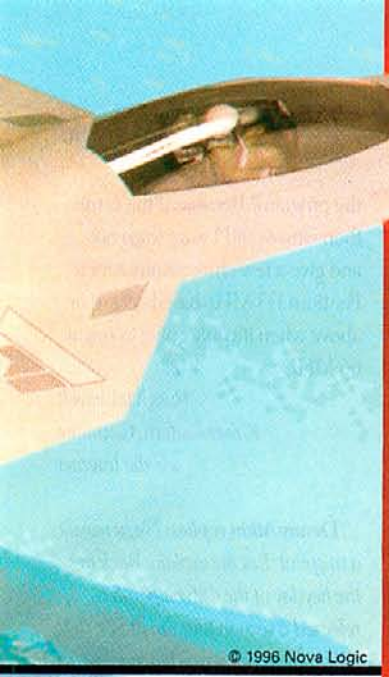
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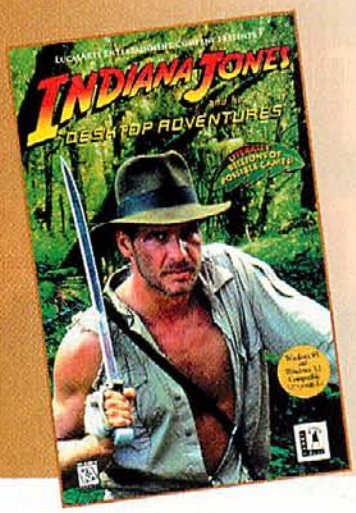
LETTER OF THE MONTH

DESKTOP OF DOOM

I notice you reviewed our game, INDIANA JONES AND HIS DESKTOP ADVENTURES, in your August '96 issue.

Thanks for spelling our names right.

Hal Barwood
LucasArts Entertainment Company



TIP-TOP 100

High praises to your new Top 100 Rating System. I've been an avid reader of CGW for over a year now and I just have to say that I never realized that the old system could be influenced by some companies by just buying tons of your magazine and then turning in those poll cards. I just thought an idiot would do something like that but hey, when it comes to selling games and making money, so what if they're called idiots. Anyway I'm glad you have this new system that you send poll cards to subscribers randomly. I'm a subscriber and I promise you if I get one of these poll cards I will fill it faithfully and send it back. My game purchases are greatly influenced by these polls so I'll be glad to give some back to those who have given. Thank you for the Playing Lately? and the Top 100!

More power in the years to come.

Raymond Lagman
Houston, TX

Thanks, Raymond. Some of the nice folks at the companies singled out in the August editorial have asked me to clarify that these attempts took place early in the history of the Top 100 poll and the actual guilty parties usually do not work at those companies anymore, as witnessed by the letter from Andy Hollis printed after this response. We mentioned the actual companies as evidence that tampering was attempted and not to "punish" said companies. We should also clarify that certain user groups or fans of particular games could feasibly "stuff the ballot box" under the old system, and the only way we could discover this was through regular postmark checks. Fortunately, that was then, this is now.

Read your column on the Top 100. Got a good chuckle on the bit about MicroProse "cheating." But hey, it wasn't cheating. You wrote the rules to a game and we just played it a little better than other folks. That's not cheating, is it? <g>

Andy Hollis
Origin Systems

Mr. Hollis designed F-15 STRIKE EAGLE III for MicroProse and most recently designed JANE'S LONGBOW for Origin Systems.

PENTIUM ARCHITECTURE SPEED LIMITS

I was buzzing through your July 1996 issue when I ran across an article by Denny Atkin on page 33. My eyes sorta' vibrated a bit when I read that, "Due to the limitations of the Pentium architecture (namely, that no Pentium chip talks to the motherboard any faster than 66 MHz)...." Whoa! Now I'm not the sharpest tool in the shed, but what this means to me is that even if I did go out and hock a limb for a Pentium 133 MHz-based system it still is going to perform at 66 MHz. Was this a misprint, or am I just not with the program? Because if this is true, then why would I want to go out and give a few chromosomes for a Pentium 133 MHz-based system or above when it's only going to run at 66 MHz?

Russ McDowell
Kaiserslautern, Germany
via the Internet

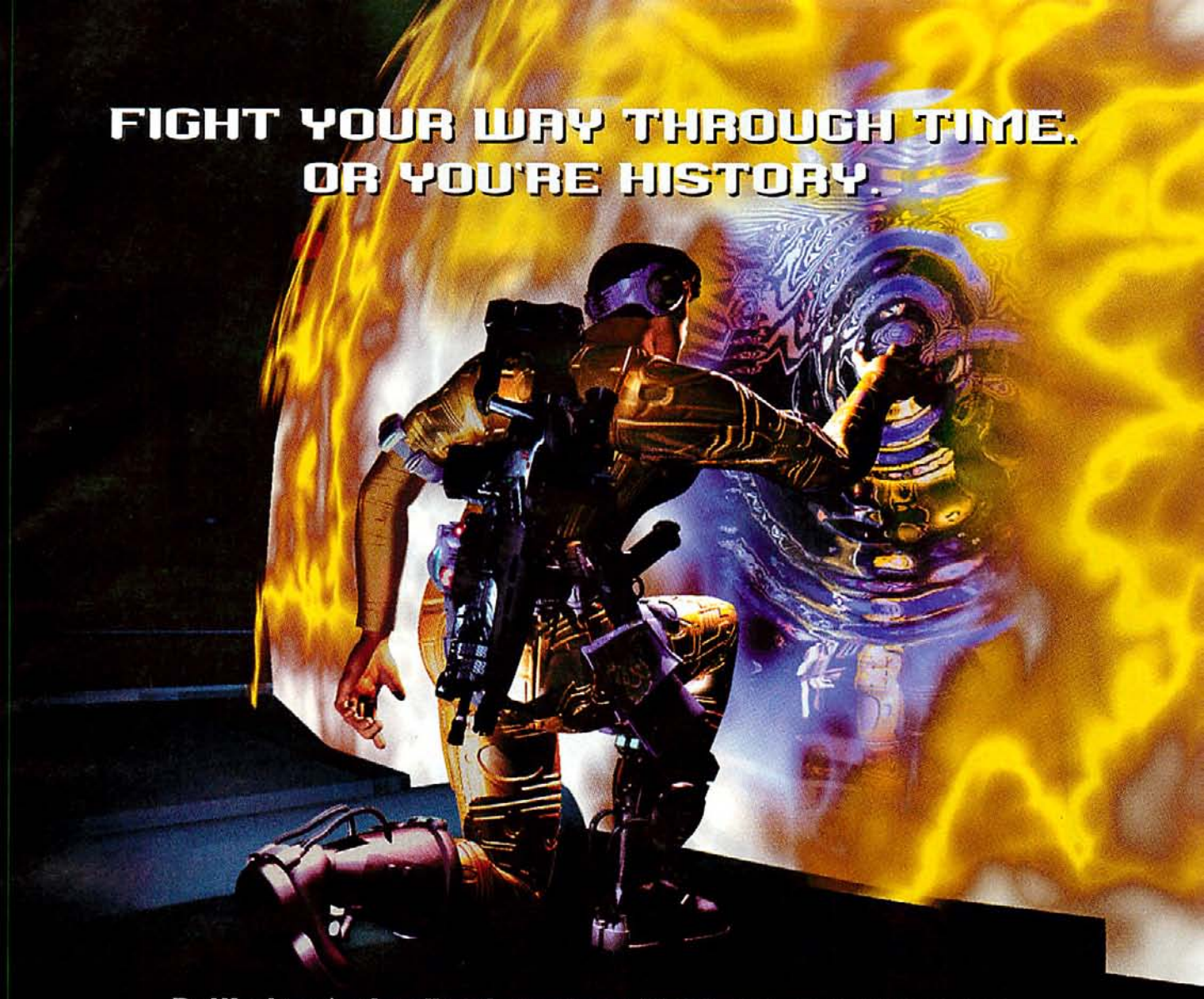
Denny Atkin replies: No, it wasn't a misprint. Let me explain. Back in the heyday of the 486 chip, Intel released a version that ran at 50 MHz. Although it was blazing fast, 50 MHz i486DX systems were often quirky, unreliable, and expensive. Although Intel has brought processor technology to the point where it could run at 50 MHz, motherboard components such as RAM and support chips were often unreliable at that high speed. Thus, Intel went with the clock-doubled DX2 system, in which the processor performs its internal calculations at double the speed of the motherboard components. Thus, a 50 MHz 486DX2 system ran the motherboard at 25MHz, while a 66MHz 486DX2 used a 33-MHz motherboard. This allowed faster processors without stressing the rest of the system.

Intel carried this design onto the second-generation Pentium chips, without making a big deal out of the clock-multipliers they used. All current Pentium designs run the motherboard at 50, 60, or 66 MHz, but they

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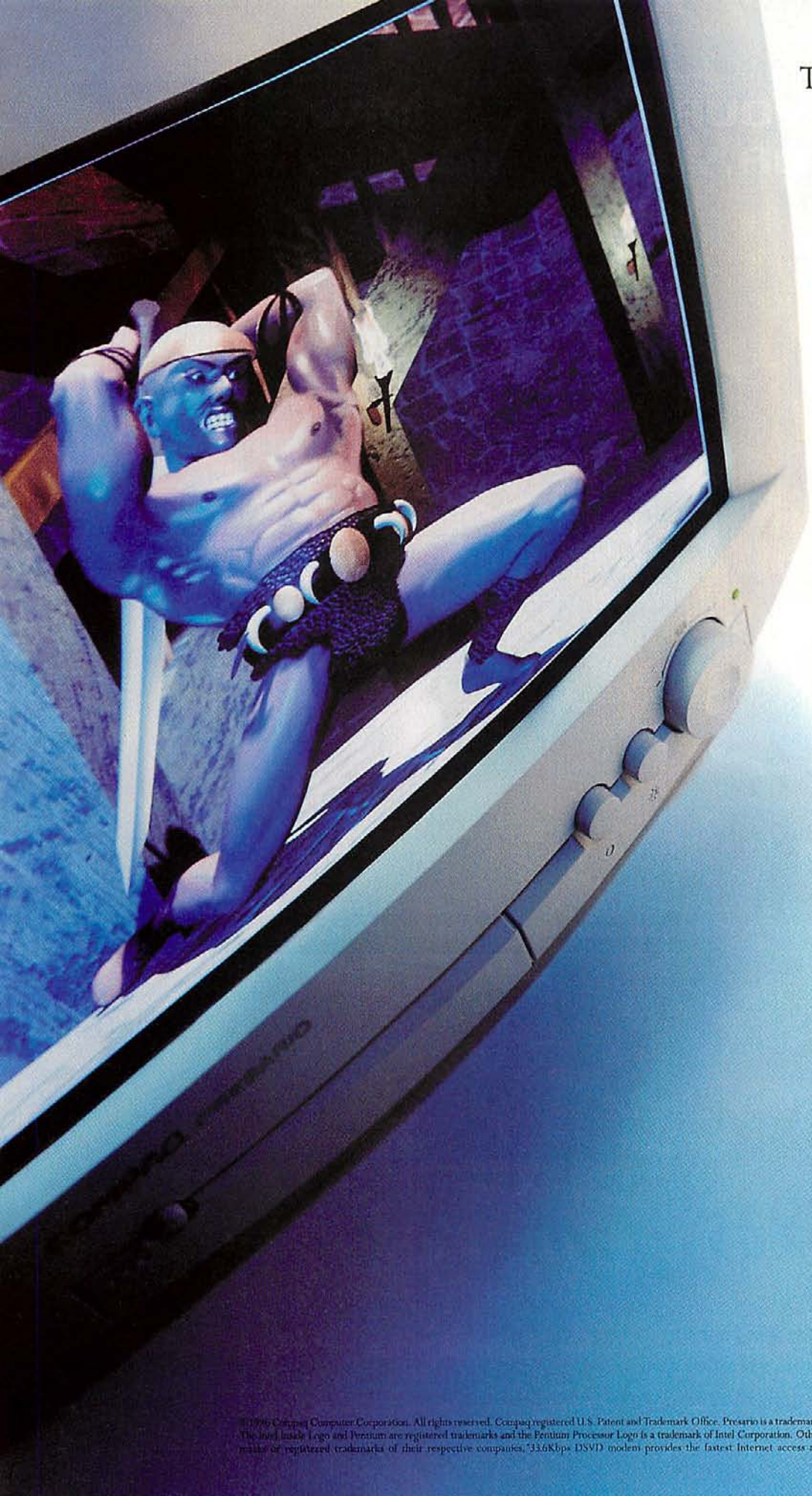
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COMPAQ

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process internal computations at 1.5 to 3 times that speed. These chips are dramatically faster than their 60 and 66 MHz predecessors, but as the multipliers increase, the return for the speedup diminishes because the bus speed remains the same. For example, a 200-MHz Pentium does do its internal calculations at double the speed of a 100-MHz chip, but both chips communicate with memory and peripherals at a pokey 66 MHz. Thus, a 200-Mhz Pentium system doesn't provide double the speed of a 100-MHz chip, but more like 1.6 times. For the same reason, a 150-MHz Pentium system is rarely much faster than a 133-Mhz system, because the faster internal processing speed is offset by the 150 MHz chip's slower motherboard speed (60 MHz, vs. 66 MHz for the 133-MHz system). Another consideration is that the 66-MHz system bus designs run their PCI bus faster, so gamers should see better video performance with these systems.

The chart below breaks down the speeds of the various Pentium systems.

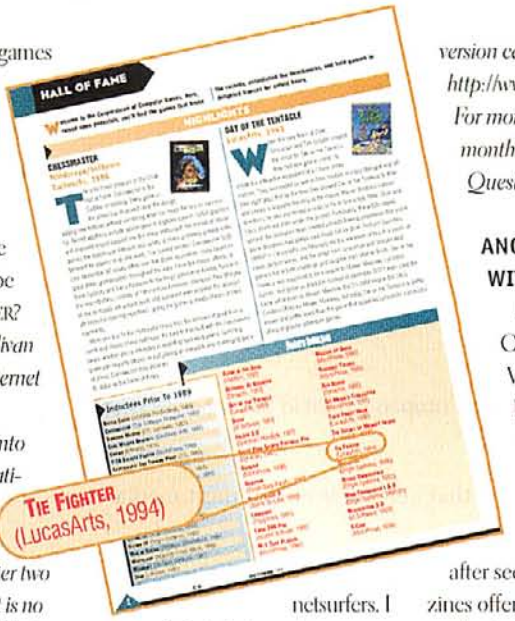
Pentium Processor Speed	Motherboard Speed	PCI Bus Speed	Clock Multiplier
60 MHz	60 MHz	30 MHz	1x
66 MHz	66 MHz	33 MHz	1x
75 MHz	50 MHz	25 MHz	1.5x
100 MHz	66 MHz	33 MHz	1.5x
120 MHz	60 MHz	30 MHz	2x
133 MHz	66 MHz	33 MHz	2x
150 MHz	60 MHz	30 MHz	2.5x
166 MHz	66 MHz	33 MHz	2.5x
200 MHz	66 MHz	33 MHz	3x

FIT TO BE TIED

I recently picked up a *Computer Gaming World* because there was an article about my old buddy Brian Reynolds' defection from MicroProse. I've always read another magazine, but I have to admit enjoying much of your mag. However... the lists in the back.

How can one of the greatest games of all time, THE FIGHTER (particularly the CD version), not make the Top One Hundred? I believe the CD update (compiled and improved) was released in the last two years so shouldn't it be on there instead of, say, RIPPER?

Nick Sullivan
via the Internet



When a game is inducted into our Hall of Fame, it is automatically removed from the Top 100. Since TIE FIGHTER was retired to the Hall of Fame after two years at the top of our chart, it is no longer in the Top 100. The Hall of Fame reflects games older than two years old and the Top 100 deals with games released within the last two years.

NET GAIN

Being on the net for just a few days, I went to your Web page because the latest issue of CGW had not yet arrived here (Philippines). I was looking forward to teasers that you would give me about your upcoming issue but instead I got more than what I thought you would willingly give free. CGW's Web page gave me the latest issue, back issues and more than what I would expect your magazine would dare to give away to netsurfers. I can't find the logic for a computer magazine, whose business is selling printed commercial material, to give away that much. Although, your Web page did have a few advertisements, how will that compensate from your labor on both mediums? I guess I'll have to leave the math to you. But thanks for one of the best sites on the Web!

Harold Tan Ong
Via the Internet

We're glad you like our Web edition. We don't believe that the online editions will ever replace the printed edition, but we think the editorial we provide online and on our CG-ROM is vital to providing a complete editorial package for our readers. We are committed to finding new ways to provide extra information for our readership and may have some more surprises for you in the future.

For those who haven't checked them out, our online editions (on AOL, Compuserve and the World Wide Web) feature some material from the current issues, some web-exclusive stories and downloads, some annotated hot links, a question of the month, and some archival material. The most accessed online version can be found at http://www.zdnet.com/gaming/. For more information, see each month's Frequently Asked Questions column.

ANOTHER READER WITH EXCELLENT TASTE

I would like to say that COMPUTER GAMING WORLD is the absolute best computer gaming magazine there is! I am constantly recieving offers to subscribe to other magazines, but after seeing what other magazines offer, I am supremely glad to get back to the best! Every other magazine I've looked at in the area of electronic entertainment has been very flashy (aren't they all!) but lacking in substance. Only CGW has been able to consistently rate and review all the latest games without giving in to easy parroting of game advertisements and only CGW seems to actually care about its readers (who else lets the readers rate games?!) more than making the easy buck. Thanks for a great magazine and PLEASE keep them coming!

Brandon Hight
via the Internet

This would be a good place for a few superlatives describing your obvious taste and superior intellect, but that goes without saying.

Niggling Bits Dep't.

In the September issue we referred to Mpath's online gaming service as Mpath. Silly us. It's actually called "Mplayer"; Mpath is the name of the company. Whatever.

Only one adventure has earned the Wizardry title...

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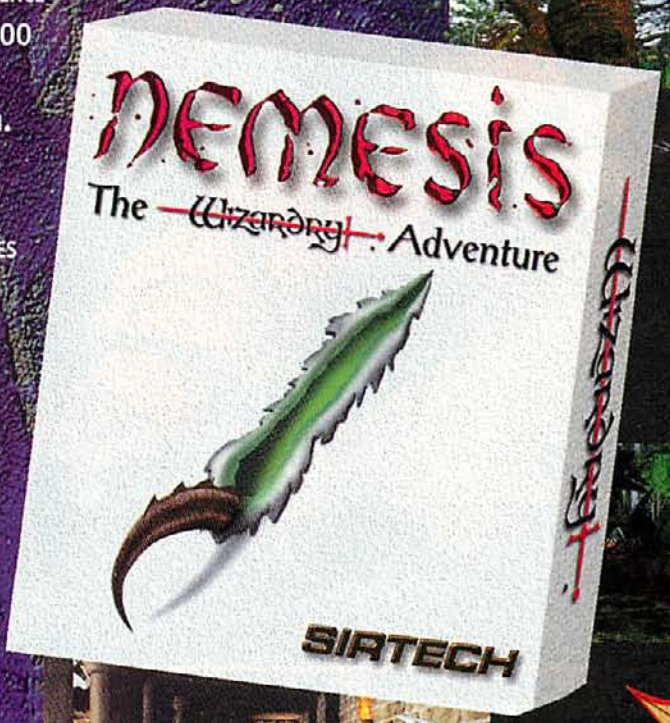
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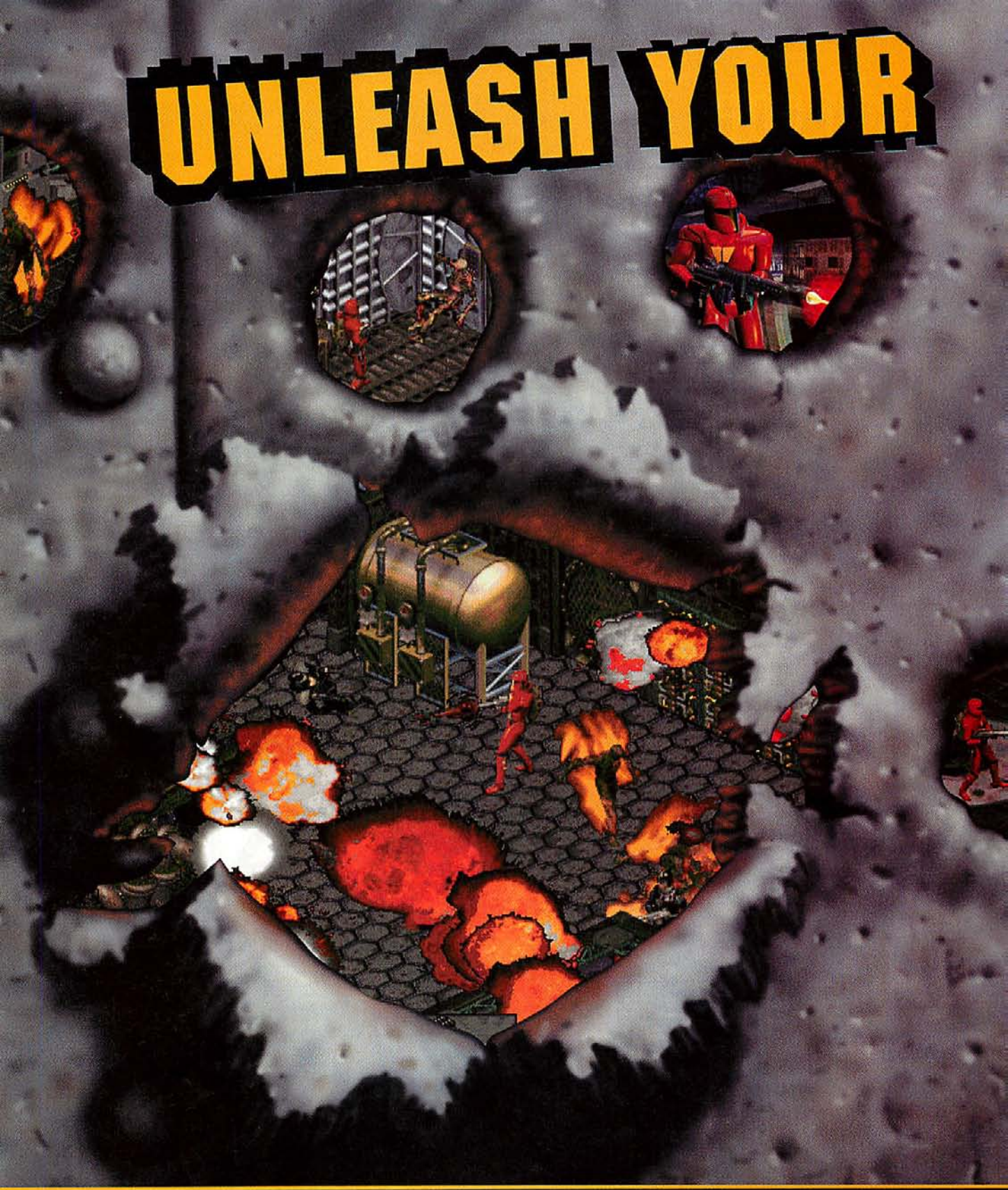
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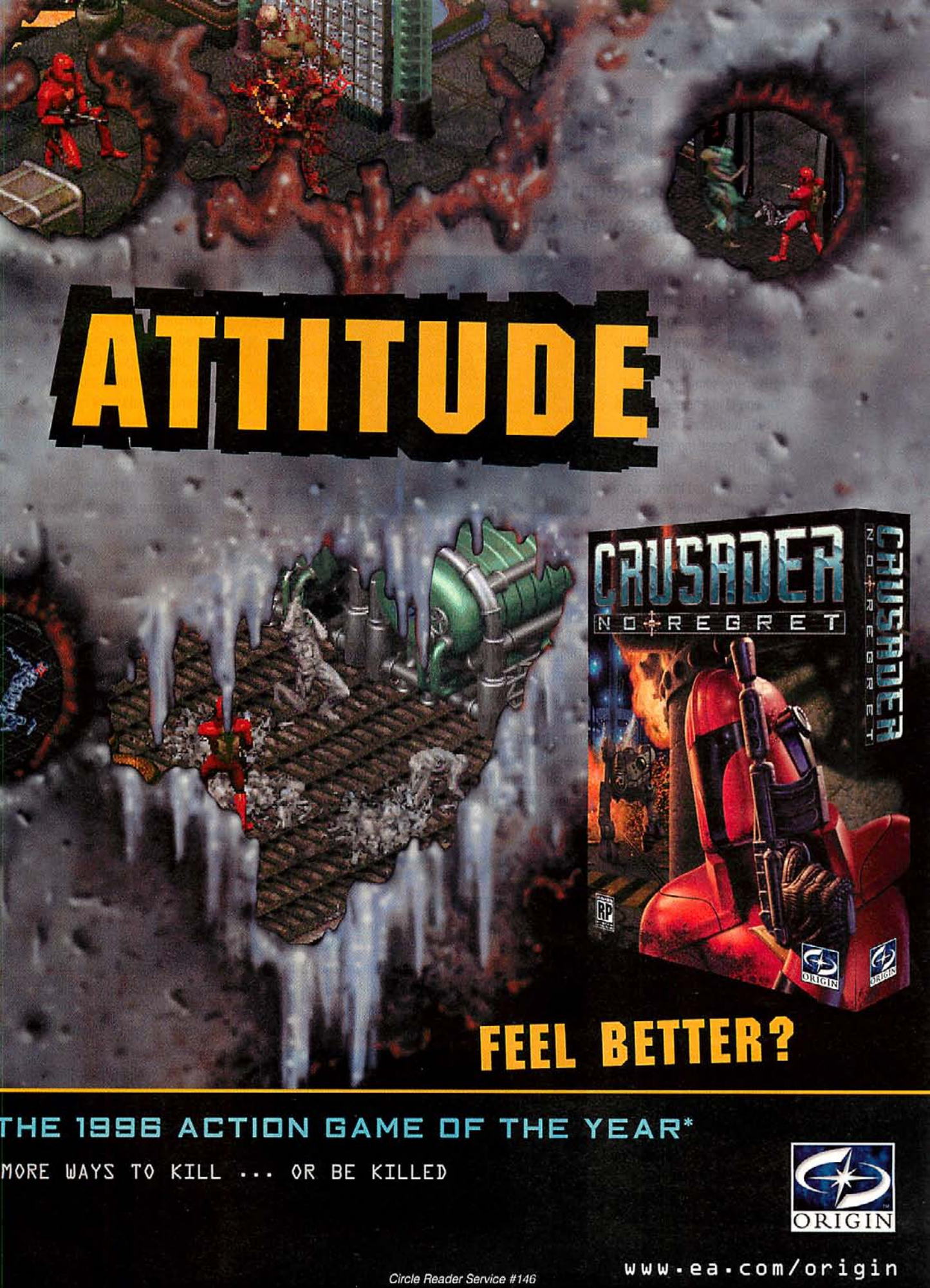
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Circle Reader Service #146

The Ego Leaves Id

John Romero Reunites With Former Id-ling Tom Hall To Make 'Crossover' Action/RPG Games

John Romero stunned the game industry in August by leaving id Software to start his own game company. Romero, sometimes called "the ego of id," helped found id in 1991 with John Carmack, Adrian Carmack (no relation) and Tom Hall. Hall and Romero have now reunited to work on "crossover" action/RPG games under a new company, tentatively entitled Dream Design.

According to Romero, Dream Design will focus almost exclusively on the design aspects of game development, rather than advancing game engine technology. Citing the difficulties involved with designing a game whose engine is incomplete, Romero says, "With a known technology, we can do whatever we want, and we can visualize what we want the design to be." The two are considering designing real-time strategy games like COMMAND AND CONQUER, but their "dream design" is to incorporate fantasy role-playing elements into a 3D action-oriented environment. Romero says he intends to license the technology of an established 3D engine, most likely id's QUAKE engine, which Romero estimates will cost about $500,000. Id's "Biz Guy" Jay Wilbur confirmed that that value is "close," and said that Romero no longer has any stake in id nor is eligible for any royalties. He quickly added, "We all wish him the best, he's friends with everyone here, and we really support his efforts...."



MISTI TAINTON

BACK IN ACTION Designers Tom Hall (*left*) and John Romero are reuniting to make their kind of games.

Romero expressed no concern about competing with his former company. He says, "There is plenty of room for QUAKE-type games. But what we want is to immerse the player by moving the genre further, or creating a hybrid."

Tom Hall most recently was the lead designer for 3D Realms' PREY, a 3D action game in which 3D Realms/Apogee has invested considerable resources. Hall says he opted to resign bacause he didn't have enough creative freedom on the project. His goal is to bring more character personality and humor into the action genre. Says Hall, "I'm more interested in bringing characters and things together and watching them collide."

PREY was slated for release by Christmas '97, but Apogee president Scott Miller says the game should ship in early '98.

Just days after Hall's departure and Romero's announcement, four additional members of Apogee, two from the PREY design team, resigned to start their own company. Robert Atkins, Michael Hadwin, Mark Dochtermann and Jim Dose have formed a new company of their own, Hypnotic Interactive. 3D Realm's Richard "Levelord" Grey, a level designer for DUKE NUKEM, also joined Hypnotic. Within days of its inception, Hypnotic signed a deal with id to develop an expansion pack for QUAKE. The pack will reportedly have more and bigger guns, more monsters and more power-ups, and the group expects to finish the project in six months.— *Jill Anderson*

ON THE SHELF

Here are some of the hottest products on the market, as well as the ones that frankly ain't so hot. Reviews for most are coming soon.

W!ZONE

As if the BEYOND THE DARK PORTAL EXPANSION SET wasn't enough, there are now even more lands to conquer for the WARCRAFT II fan. W!ZONE is a collection of some 50 odd scenarios, some good and some not so good.



The variety is amazing: there are single-player maps, multi-player maps, cooperative maps and all-for-one maps. W!ZONE also has several "historical" maps–reenactments of real-life engagements–such as Agincourt, using WARCRAFT II units in place of real ones.

What is most cool about this product, though, is the documentation. W!ZONE comes with a 80-page booklet that offers pages upon pages of useful tips, unit and building descriptions, and a paragraph-sized description of each scenario.

WizardWorks, (612) 559-5140

DOS and Windows 95 CD-ROM

Reader Service #301

PILOT ALERT

FALCON 4.0 On Track For 1997 Takeoff

Spectrum HoloByte first showed early work on FALCON 4.0 way back in the Fall of 1994. With little news on the project–other than reports of turnovers in the development team–in the ensuing years, many sim fans had written the program off, figuring it would never ship. Spectrum recently invited us to its offices to take a look at the latest version, slated to ship in the first half of 1997 under the MicroProse label.

Unlike that first look two years ago, this time major portions of the game are up and running. Spending about an hour flying the Alpha version on a system equipped with the 3Dfx Voodoo 3D accelerator definitely gave me the impression that this game will be worth the wait. No other sim has captured the feel of moving over real terrain at high speed this well–the 16-bit color graphics were spectacular. Set in Korea, the sim uses satellite data to accurately model the jagged terrain.

But the FALCON series isn't about looks, it's about hardcore accurate simulation. FALCON 4.0 is set to deliver that in spades, modeling a huge chunk of the real systems of an F-16C Block 52. These include the APG-68 radar (including the modes omitted in BACK TO BAGHDAD), HARM targeting, laser designation, and probably LANTIRN systems. Options abound: fly with a full instrument panel, or pop-up Multi-Function Displays; choose from three padlock modes; and start the game in situations ranging from armed neutrality through near defeat.

FALCON 4.0's campaign system was designed from the ground up to support multiplayer play, to the extreme that solo play is actually treated as a network game with only one player. Along with campaign play, there are also two instant action setups. Dogfight mode is pure air-to-air action. The Tactical Engagement mode gives you a mission builder where you can place assets such as SAMS, fighters, bombers, AWACS, and ground targets; define your mission goals; then jump into single- or multiplayer combat.





CAN THIS BE REAL? Satellite data and 16-bit color contribute to FALCON 4's outstanding terrain graphics.

The team seems determined to equip FALCON 4.0 with the same amazing shelf life as its predecessor. The scaleable sim engine will support graphics resolutions higher than current processors can reasonably support, and there's even talk of eventual multiprocessor support under Windows NT. — *Denny Atkin*

TRIPLE PLAY 97

It took EA Sports until the middle of the baseball season, but they finally got TRIPLE PLAY 97 out the door. The good news is that it was worth the wait. This is now easily the best action-oriented baseball game on the market. Great graphics, motion-captured movements (except for the oddly swishy way that batters walk to the plate) and sound effects, along with an interface designed for maximum ease, combine to make this a game entertaining and accessible enough to appeal to even casual sports fans. Serious baseball gamers can find a lot to rip this game for–such as a strike zone the size of Montana–but why fight it? With built-in GrIP support for up to six players, this is the one baseball game on the PC that you can actually play with friends without having to constantly apologize for the way the game looks and feels. Like heading over to the park on Saturday to whack a few balls around, this is for baseball fans who just want to get onto the field and have a good time.—*J. Green*



EA Sports, (415) 571-7171

PC CD-ROM

Reader Service #302

NUKE IT

So, you've duked it out with the alien Overlord, saved all the chicks on Earth, and now you need something more. Well, NUKE IT tries to give you more, but it gives more in such a shoddy way as to make it less. While other "level" discs of this type have been released, they at least include some rudimentary install/setup program, be it ANSI art or Windows interface. But *nooo!* NUKE IT just gives you the levels divided up alphabetically, and the manual basically says "look for a level you like and install it yerself, bub." And they're not very good levels either. Level descriptions scream: "Hey! this is my first level ever, but I'm learning!" If this can be clas-



A journey so bizarre, it makes Woodstock look like a REPUBLICAN *convention.*



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Circle Reader Service #212

PONG CREATOR BOUNCES BACK

Atari Founder Bushnell Introduces Multiplayer Arcade Game

From the early days of PONG to the glory days of Atari and the early days of Chuck E. Cheese, Nolan Bushnell's biggest successes have been with games and entertainment. Once, Bushnell said he was finished with the game business. Now, he's introduced a new company called Aristo International to produce three new products, all pay-for-play internet-connected devices for distribution in restaurants, bars, hotels, college campuses, and, presumably, a host of other public places. Though preferring to be known as an entertainment company, as opposed to being billed as a "game company," the new company will produce game-related products.

One product will be called TouchNet. It is expected to be a small box about the size of an oversized microwave oven containing a touch screen and two telephone receivers. TouchNet will let people play simple games, buy merchandise, send email, or chat by transmitting actual voice recordings. Since this is all linked via the internet, people can play or chat or send email with other people anywhere in the country, and eventually, the world.



INTERNET CONSOLE Aristo's multiplayer TeamNet can be played head-to-head against a team on the other side of the table or the other side of the country.

The main gaming-related product is TeamNet, consisting of a table about the size of an air hockey game with two video screens and eight player positions (four per side). Players can engage in team games, playing head-to-head against a team on the other side of the table, or compete against a team on the other side of the country. The first game we saw in prototype was a football game in which one player took the quarterback role and the other three players became receivers.

The other product was non-gaming related. MusicNet Plus will be a high-tech, net-connected jukebox with thousands of recordings listed, plus lots of extras, like merchandise, concert ticket purchase, and even ways to send feedback to your favorite artists.

The nationwide launch of the product line will occur this Fall with a worldwide launch scheduled for January, 1997.

—Rusel DeMaria



INTERNET JAMS Bushnell hopes his jukebox/tickets service will become an "angel of music."

ON THE SHELF

sified as anything it's shovelware. The only justification for its existence is for those who don't have unlimited, flat-rate Internet access, and don't want to spend three bucks an hour downloading levels. But perhaps you should, because you *will* find better levels than these. Recommendation to those who bought this: nuke it.—*T. Nguyen*

Micro Star Software, (619)-931-4949

PC CD-ROM

Reader Service #303

LINKS LS

LINKS 386 remained the standard-setter for PC golf games well into the Pentium years. Now LINKS LS looks ready to carry the series through the next three generations of processors. Supporting graphics resolutions ranging from 800 x 600 pixels up past 1600 x 1200, with color depths ranging from 32,000 colors to over 16 million, LINKS



LS sports graphics unrivaled by any PC game, in any genre. But the upgrade isn't all about looks. The ball flight model has been improved, and Match, Best Ball, and Skins play added. You can take on computer players, or go head-to-head over a modem or network connection. Three courses are included, and if you own any LINKS 386 courses, LS will automatically create hi-res versions of those courses for you. Numerous view windows and a pop-up control panel that gets out of your way completes the package, and there's even an interactive VR tour of Arnold Palmer's (who you can play as or against) clubhouse. A duffer's dream.— *D. Atkin Jr.*

Access Software, (800) 800-4880

PC CD-ROM

Reader Service #304

STEEL PANTHERS CAMPAIGN DISK

This CD provides a rousing collection of battles—from the obscure *Nowy Yarg, Poland* to the famous *Kursk Fire Brigade*. There are paratroop landings (*5th Guards Para At Kanev*) and even Pacific theatre engagements (*Bloody Ridge, Gualdalcanal*). The robust campaigns offer plenty of adrenaline-pumping action, as you attempt to overrun Moscow in *Barbarossa*, run as far as your

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Circle Reader Service #175

MMX MIA: New Pentium Chips Delayed Until '97

Intel's new P55C Pentium chip, originally slated for release before the holidays, has been delayed until the first quarter of 1997. This updated Pentium chip includes the MMX instruction set, which will allow developers to significantly speed up applications such as real-time audio manipulation and high-speed display of 24-bit color graphics. Because the MMX enhancements require specific support in programs, the more significant initial speedup will likely come from the P55C's double-size 32K internal Level 1 cache.

A better solution for power-hungry gamers may come from Intel's updated Pentium Pro chip, code-named *Klamath*, set to ship around the same time as the P55C. This redesigned chip also sports the MMX instruction set, but does away with the original Pentium Pro's huge internal 256K cache in order to dramatically reduce size and cost. Performance should still be significantly better than a Pentium running at the same clock speed, thanks in part to the Pro's dramatically faster floating-point capabilities, and especially if the rumored improved support for running 16-bit applications pans out.—*Denny Atkin*

Firaxis Finds A Publisher

Sid Meier's new Firaxis Software has signed an exclusive publishing agreement with Electronic Arts. EA will distribute Firaxis' titles under the EA Origin brand.

PLAYING LATELY?

Here are the games readers are actually blowing the most time with, as opposed to the reader's overall "quality ranking" in the Top 100.

READERS' TOP 10

WarCraft II kicks Duke Nukem 3D out of first place this month, while Civilization II rises to the number two slot. Wing Commander IV creeps back onto the chart at number 10. Command and Conquer and Doom II continue to climb steadily, but Steel Panthers and Heroes of Might and Magic are on the descent.

You'll no longer find the *CGW* Poll Card bound into the magazine, but check your mail box: We mail a survey to 1,500 randomly-chosen subscribers each month, and we use the results to calculate the Top 100 And Playing Lately each month.

		Last Month	Months On Chart
1.	**WarCraft II** (Blizzard)	2	8
2.	**Civilization II** (MicroProse)	3	5
3.	**Duke Nukem 3D** (3D Realms)	1	6
4.	**Command and Conquer** (Virgin / Westwood)	7	11
5.	**MechWarrior 2** (Activision)	5	10
6.	**Doom II** (id Software)	8	7
7.	**Heroes of Might and Magic** (New World Computing)	4	10
8.	**Steel Panthers** (SSI)	6	10
9.	**Panzer General** (SSI)	10	19
10.	**Wing Commander IV** (Origin)	-	9

ON THE SHELF



petrol will take you in *Patton's 3rd Army*, and take Rommel's command outside of Alexandria in Battle for North Africa. A nice way to keep you skills sharp while you're waiting for Steel Panthers II.— *T. Coleman*

SSI, (800) 245-4525

PC Diskette

Reader Service #305

SHELLSHOCK

CG WARM

Eidos (formerly Domark) has a hot new ride for you: the M-13 Predator Battletank. Climb into this first-person shooter and get ready to kick some evil oppressor butt throughout the world.

As the newest member of The Wardenz–sort of a self-styled, five-man U.N. peace keeping force–you'll be rolling into all the world's trouble spots, from Europe to Africa. Although the names have been changed to protect guilty countries, you'll recognize the geography and the scenarios from today's newspapers.

Shellshock is long on action and short on realism. A typical early mission pits you one-in-twenty-four, against an entire armored column. You'll definitely want to purchase upgrades for your armor and armament before hitting the



tough levels.—*M. Clarkson*

Eidos, (415) 693-0698

PC CD-ROM

Reader Service #306

NORMALITY

CG HOT

Nothing in Normality is quite what you'd expect it to be. But then, nothing in Neutropolis has been, well, *normal*, for 30 years. The once radical, free-thinking utopia has became a stinking pit of boredom. In this 3D animated adven-

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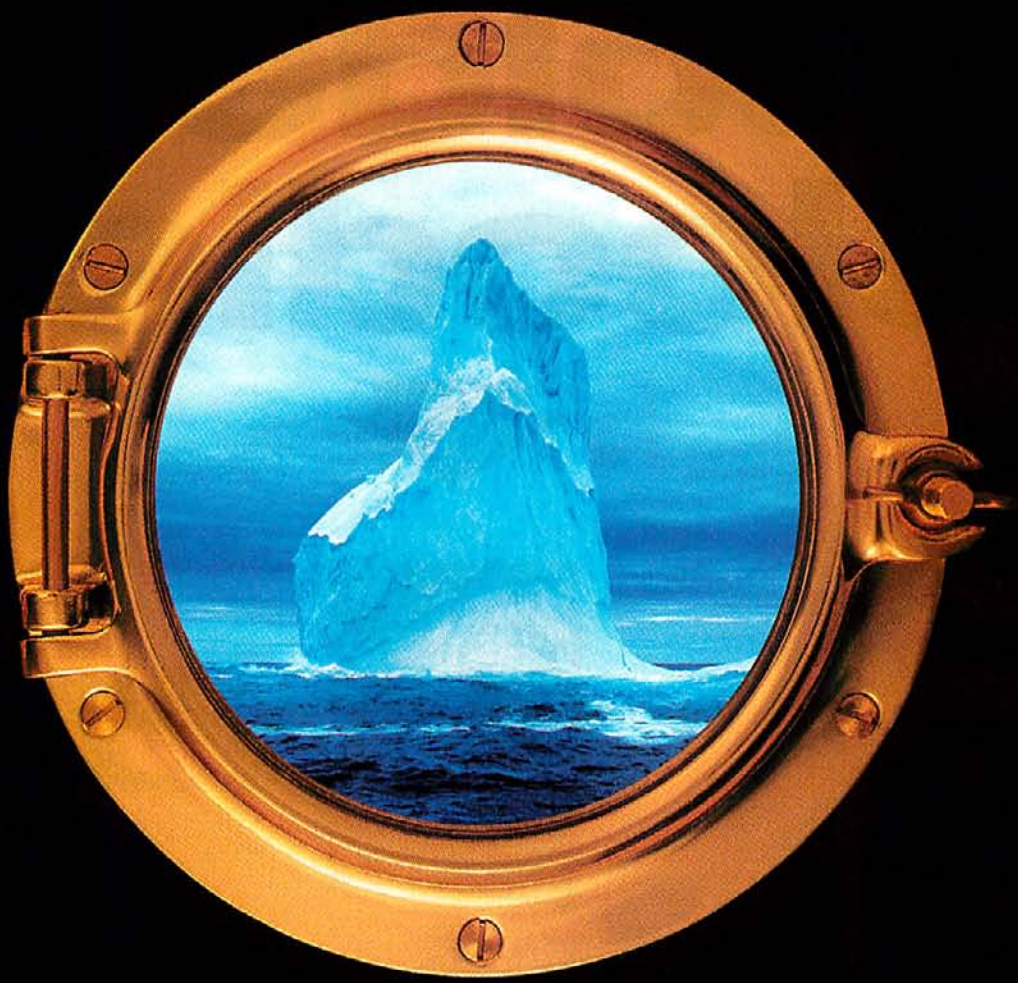
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www.blizzard.com

Circle Reader Service #265

TITANIC

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Circle Reader Service #240

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GTE Entertainment

ON THE SHELF



something a little different. Good 3D rendered graphics make for a visually exciting landscape. Experienced adventure gamers should find a good challenge here, and while novices may initially find themselves dazed and confused, solid helpings of humor keep up the entertainment value. Check it out, dude.—*C. Panther*

Interplay, (714) 553-6678; www.interplay.com

PC CD-ROM

Reader Service #307

ture, you become Kent, a mellow surfer-dude-type, with an annoying pseudo-Californian accent (think Jim Carey meets Keanu Reeves in *Bill and Ted*). Locked up by the Norm police for whistling an annoying tune and being just too darn happy, you receive a strange note, written in ear-wax, indicating you're not the only smiley person around. And so begins your mission to dig out like-minded souls, from a population of couch potatoes.

A combination of *1984* and *The Young Ones*, this is definitely a game for those who want

SHADOAN

Anyone who enjoyed KINGDOM: THE FAR REACHES will find themselves on familiar ground in SHADOAN. In Book Two of this animated fantasy adventure series, the apprentice wizard Lathan returns to find the remaining two relics that will free the kingdom from an evil mage.

SHADOAN features two difficulty levels, the easier of which gives you more time to make decisions and leaves out some of the puzzles. Unfortunately, the omission of these can make the story seem somewhat disconnected. It's also possible to set off on a "no-win" track, where every course of action is one of certain death. Even though you're afforded three lives, the game allows only five save games, so

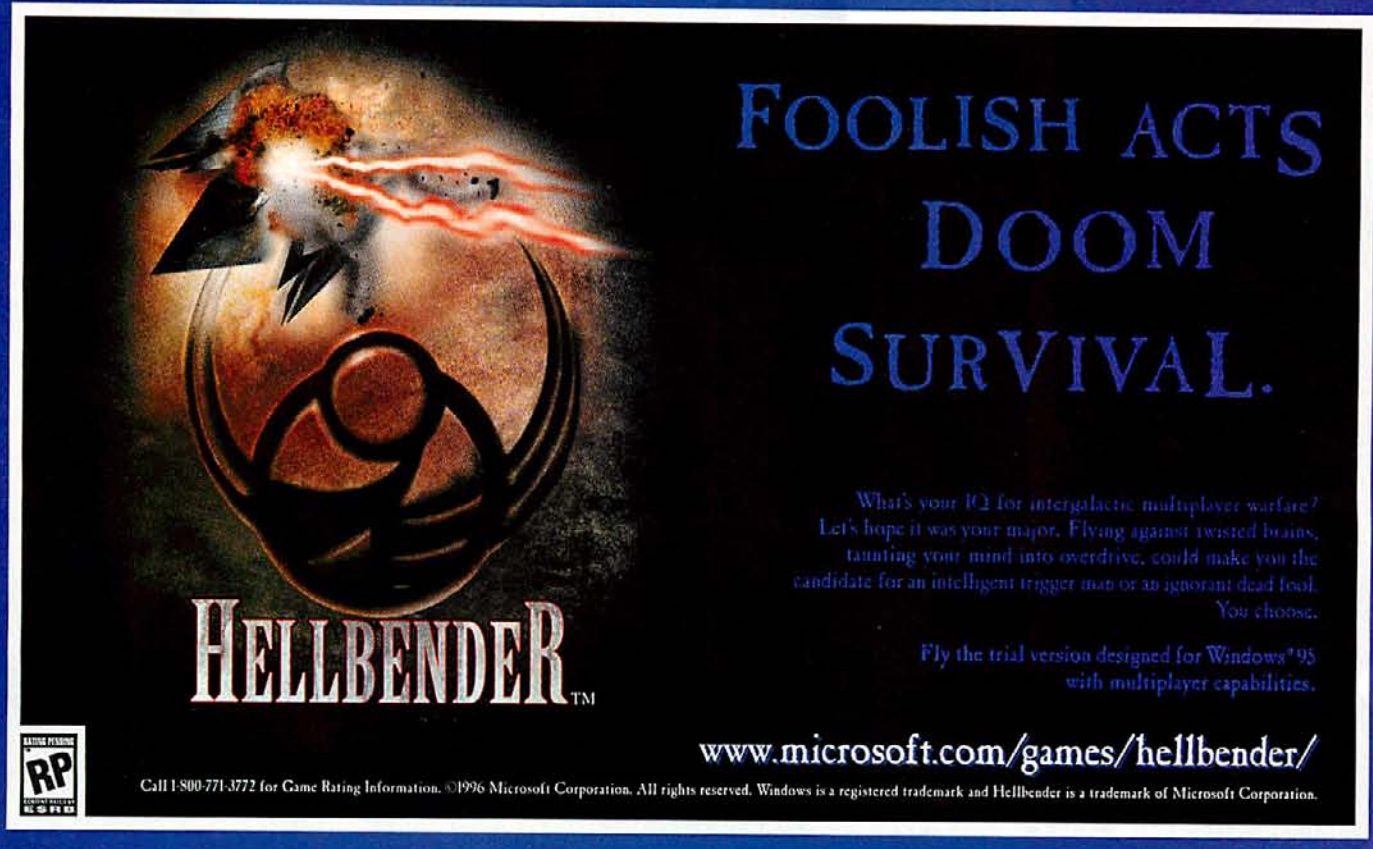


choose wisely or you'll find yourself starting over from the beginning. For anyone looking for a pleasant, traditional fantasy tale aimed squarely at the family market.—*K. Hedstrom*

Interplay, (714) 553-6678

PC CD-ROM

Reader Service #308





PlayStation

PC CD

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Circle Reader Service #62

FIRST LOOK

Here's an early look at the coolest titles soon to seduce you from your money and your life. 'FIRST LOOK' games are still months away and can't even be played yet, but at least you can see how they are shaping up. This month, a closer look at JEDI KNIGHT.

Jedi Knight

JEDI KNIGHT will be the first "QUAKE-killer" on the market, and with its *Star Wars* story line and DARK FORCES lineage, it could easily score a direct hit. *CGW* recently had a chance to visit LucasArts to learn more about this epic struggle between the forces of Light and Dark.

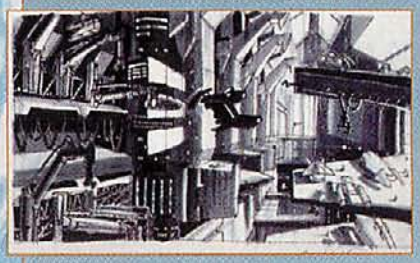
The story has been fleshed out since our brief peek at the title in our August issue's fall games roundup feature. You play Kyle Katarn from Dark Forces but you're no longer a mercenary. Your father, it seems, was murdered by a Dark Jedi of great evil and power, Jerec, who covets the power held in a hidden Jedi burial ground. Your father gave up his life to protect this secret from Jerec, and you must now avenge your father's death and continue his quest to stop Jerec's evil scheme.



THE VALLEY OF THE JEDI This is an artist's sketch of the Jedi burial ground. The power of all the dead Jedi is said to be stored here, which you and Jerec need.

The game takes place after the fall of the Empire chronicled in the *Star Wars* movies. (For *Star Wars* buffs: It's concurrent with the time Luke is running his Jedi Academy, as told in the *Star Wars* books, and when Han and Leia's twins are training to become Jedi.) Since the story does take place after *Return of the Jedi*, Darth Vadar will not make a guest appearance in the game. Neither will Boba Fett. The JEDI KNIGHT team is hoping to carve out its own niche in *Star Wars* history, rather than ride on the fame of the more well-known *Star Wars* characters.

JEDI KNIGHT is fundamentally a 3D, first-person perspective shooter. However, unlike its predecessor, DARK FORCES, it won't be a mission-based game where you blow through a level, receive a briefing for the next one, then repeat the process. Instead, after you complete a mission, a full-motion video cut scene will advance the story, and then take you to another location where gameplay will resume.



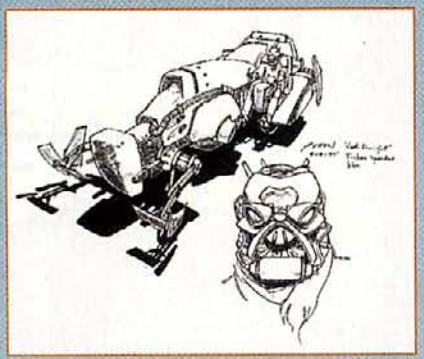
Yes, JEDI KNIGHT will employ full-motion video cut scenes, in which live actors will portray Kyle, Jerec and the other main characters. During gameplay, though, all characters and levels will be rendered with gorgeous, texture-mapped polygons.

One of the game's best features is the choice to join either the Dark Side or Light Side of the Force. The goal in the game doesn't actually change once you've made your choice, but your motivation does. If you remain with the Light Side, you want to stop Jerec and preserve both the sanctity and safety of the Jedi Burial Ground and the galaxy. If you join the Dark Side, you'll want to stop Jerec so *you* can take the power of the burial ground for yourself.

What does depend on your decision, however, are your Jedi abilities. The exact format hasn't been worked out yet, but after every mission, you will accrue a certain number of points which can be divided among different abilities. These "experience points" aren't based on kills but rather on level completion. Jedi abilities will include super speed, super strength, Darth Vadar's famous choking ability, and increased damage with the light saber. If you join the Dark Side, you will get suitably evil abilities, such as skin-burning lightning blasts, and if you join the Light Side, you will gain more beneficial attributes like healing powers.

The weapons that have been confirmed for the game include: a pistol, a Stormtrooper rifle, a thermal detonator and the Light Saber. For all the regular nasties in the levels, like Stormtroopers and AT-ST Walkers, you can use whatever weapon works best (probably the long-range weapons). However, for the bosses and the Dark Jedi, you will *have* to use the Light Saber, which is basically JEDI KNIGHT's "BFG." This weapon has the shortest range but will do the most damage. Not only will you be able to perform different special attacks with it, but you'll also be able to increase its damage with your Jedi abilities.

JEDI KNIGHT is slated for an early 1997 release. Look for a full Sneak Preview of JEDI KNIGHT in the upcoming January issue. —*E. Chin*



LIGHT SABER FODDER One of JEDI KNIGHT's enemies will be the Tuskens (from the *Star Wars* movie), who will harass you on foot, speeder bikes and Kell Dragons.

HANDS ON

These are the products in development we've actually spent some time with. They represent some of the most interesting titles in the Pipeline, and they are complete enough to actually tell how they're going to play. Most should be released soon.

Master of Orion II: Battle of Antares

In 1993, Steve Barcia and his fledgling company, Simtex, were no more a sure thing than the possibility of life on Mars. That their star shines so brightly now is a reflection of the remarkable fountain of creativity and sheer fun that bursts from each of their games. Despite the well-documented bugs in MASTER OF MAGIC, Simtex has yet to publish anything less than a very good game. And MASTER OF ORION II looks to be their best yet, combining the scope of MOM and the flavor of the original MOO with a greatly improved interface.



Instead of the Orions, this time you face the mysterious Antarans, a powerful civilization that can only be reached by transdimensional warp. This technology is still developed via the familiar resource point-based system that gave the original MOO its "CIVILIZATION in Space" flavor.

The various space-faring races are much the same as they were in MOO: Bulrathi are more physical, and therefore better in ground combat. Silicoids thrive on worlds on which most species cannot even survive. Darloks pull espionage stunts that would make even Mata Hari blush. Don't be lulled by their familiarity, however; these computer opponents are tougher than in the original—and the best diplomatic AI in strategy games is harder than ever to crack. Other nice touches include an online tutorial and heroes from MOM (toned down so that they don't overwhelm the game). Finally, if the vast array of star systems to colonize, customizable ship designs, technologies to research, and combat tactics can't keep you enthralled when playing solo, MOO II lets you test your strategies in multiplayer mode. Hotseat, modem, and e-mail are supported to keep you gaming for eons, and will very likely keep BATTLE OF ANTARES on retailers' shelves for some time to come.
—T. Coleman

MicroProse, (410) 771-0440
PC CD-ROM

Ten Pin Alley

When a smirking *CGW* editor plopped this computer bowling simulation on my desk, I was overcome with existential angst. Bowling games? This is what I'm doing with my life? Maybe my mother was right.

But TEN PIN ALLEY, now in beta, looks like a well-designed game that may bring a modicum of respect to a maligned genre. Gameplay somewhat resembles a golf sim. From a first-person perspective, you line up your feet on the lane, and then use a device akin to a golf sim's swing meter to time the ball's release with the desired velocity and spin. Once you've released the ball, the view switches to a third-person perspective, where you watch your 3D character bowl based on your actions. Like real bowling, it's not as easy as it looks, and until you start mastering the ability to control the ball's arc and spin, you're pretty much going to suck. The game's ball and pin physics are quite realistic, and the sound effects are great—getting a strike is immensely satisfying, while slamming a ball into the gutter is just as embarrassing as in real life.

More than just an arcade game, TEN PIN ALLEY can actually track stats over a lifetime career, and also includes a variety of real-life historical data and tips from the Bowling Hall of Fame.—*J. Green*

American Softworks Corp., (203) 327-3366
PC CD-ROM

PIPELINE

AD&D Blood & Magic	Interplay	10/96
Age of Sail Talonsoft	Winter	96
Aide De Camp 2	HPS Simulations	Fall 96
Air Warrior II	Interactive Magic	Fall 96
Battles of Alexander	Interactive Magic	Spring 97
Callahan's Crosstime Saloon	Legend	10/96
Dark Earth	Mindscape	Spring 97
Definitive Wargame Set II	SSI	10/96
Destruction Derby II	Psygnosis	Winter 96
Diablo	Blizzard	10/96
Discworld II: Reality Bytes	Psygnosis	11/96
Dungeon Keeper	EA/Bullfrog	Fall 96
Ecsatica II	Psygnosis	2/97
F22 Lightning II	Nova Logic	10/96
Fighter Duel 2	Philips	Spring 97
Flight Sim for Win 95	Microsoft	11/96
FPS Football Pro 97	Sierra	11/96
Gene Wars	EA/Bullfrog	10/96
Flying Nightmares 2	Domark	Winter 96
Hardball 6	Accolade	Spring 97
Harpoon Classic 97	Interactive Magic	11/97
Heroes of Might and Magic II	New World	10/96
History of the World	Avalon Hill	Fall 96
iF22	Interactive Magic	Winter 96
iM1A2 Abrams	Interactive Magic	10/96
Interstate 76	Activision	Winter 96
Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II	LucasArts	2/97
Jetfighter III	Mission Studios	10/96
Leisure Suit Larry 7	Sierra	11/96
Lords of the Realm II	Sierra	11/96
Lost Vikings II	Interplay	12/96
Magic of Xanth	Legend	Winter 96
Master of Orion II	MicroProse	Fall 96
Myst II	Broderbund	Winter 96
NBA Full Court Press	Microsoft	10/96
New Order	Epic	Winter 96
NFL Instant Replay	Philips	Fall 96
NFL Legends	Accolade	11/96
Obsidian	Rocket Science	10/96
One Must Fall	Epic	Fall 96
Pacific Tide	Arsenal	Fall 96
PC Panzerblitz	Avalon Hill	Spring 97
Pod	UbiSoft	Fall 96
Privateer II: The Darkening	Origin	11/96
Pro Pinball	Interplay	10/96
Red Baron II	Sierra	11/96
Return to Krondor	7th Level	Fall 96
Reverence	Cyberdreams	Fall 96
Risk!	Hasbro Interactive	Fall 96
Shadow Warrior	3D Realms/FormGen	Fall 96
Shattered Steel	Interplay	10/96
SimGolf	Maxis	Fall 96
Spider Man and the Sinister Six	Byron Preiss	11/96
Star Craft	Blizzard	3/97
Star Fleet Academy	Interplay	Winter 96
Star General	SSI	11/96
Steel Panthers II	SSI	10/96
Syndicate Wars	EA	10/96
TFX 3	Ocean	Q1/97
Tomb Raiders	Domark/Eidos	Winter 96
Toonstruck	Virgin/Burst	11/96
Vampire Diaries	Her Interactive	Fall 96
VR Golf	VR Sports	11/96
Xenophage	Apogee/FormGen	Fall/96
X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter	LucasArts	Winter 96
You Don't Know Jack II	Berkeley Systems	10/96

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HANDS ON

Star Control 3



So, you think you can relax after defeating the Hierarchy Of Battle-Thralls and their main battleship the Sa-Matra? Well, it seems that there's *still* some work for you to do in the newest installment of the STAR CONTROL series. Your mission: to explore and colonize the Kessari Quadrant while investigating the cause of "interdimensional fatigue." You will also be heading the new League of Sentient Races, which include friends such as the Pkunk, and even enemies such as the mighty Ur-Quan.

But what's a game without some foes? Enter the Hegemonic Crux, a band of six races (initially) out to conquer the Quadrant and anyone in it. As in the two previous Star Cons, you'll engage in a nasty galactic war filled with conflicting interests, shifting alliances, and good old-fashioned combat.

While billed as an adventure game, STAR CONTROL 3 has many elements found in other genres. It mainly combines strategy (colony management), action (the famous Hyper Melee), and adventure (dialogue and interaction with all the alien races). The graphics are quite good, in both HyperMelee and dialogue scenes. Accolade filmed puppets for the dialogue scenes, so you get a better sense of "realism" in the aliens' speech and movements. The HyperMelee is once again fast and fun, Accolade's only change is an enhancement of an additional 3D view; the cooler ships from the previous games make a reappearance along with the all-new ships. The only real annoyance is the voice-acting in some parts. But it's a small quibble for such a big game.

In the end, with a big galaxy for colony management, fast-paced arcade action, and a good sci-fi story with Lovecraftian influences (and some *very* funny dialogue), STAR CONTROL 3 may truly earn the title of "space opera."—*T. Nguyen*

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Circle Reader Service #270



HANDS ON

The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall

THE ELDER SCROLLS: DAGGERFALL We've been waiting for two years for this sequel to THE ELDER SCROLLS: ARENA. So, what have we got to show for it? Its improved graphics offer curved walls, sloping ramps, hidden doors, stairs, and water for swimming or traversing via buoyancy spells. You aren't even stuck with the same old wardrobe all the way through the game, since you can change clothes, armor and weapons as you progress through the rich game universe. The new sound effects feature cues for monster proximity (and population density), as well as providing for impressive weapon clashes that enhance almost every combat. Also, DAGGERFALL adds new 3D terrain features (ARENA offered a relatively flat environment) and the ability to climb and/or levitate past a multitude of 3D objects.

In addition, the game allows a greater variety of character classes with more-detailed (but optional) character generation. It also features an improved combat system that requires you to use the mouse in near analog mode to wield the new melange of weapons. It is a "melange" because the wide assortment of weapons and armor features class, skill and weight restrictions. So, even though you may find the equivalent of the legendary "Sword of I Win" in a given dungeon, your bard character may not be able to wield it. Such detail only provides a tip of the iceberg view of the depth found in this role-playing game.







Character generation in THE ELDER SCROLLS: DAGGERFALL is similar to that in THE ELDER SCROLLS: ARENA. You can merely choose the character class (general occupation) for your character and abstract the character's background, or you can go through two multiple choice questionaires to accomplish the same thing. Character class, as in ARENA, is determined by multiple choice answers to 10 ethical dilemmas. Background is determined by answering specific questions by selecting an answer from longer lists. So, your initial inventory, armament and skills are determined by these two questionaires.

Ideally, DAGGERFALL should put gamers in mind of the best features of WASTELAND and ULTIMA IV. DAGGERFALL offers plenty of hack 'n slash, but it also offers more free-range in developing character, joining guilds, following mini-quests, and resolving the grand plot than any CRPG in recent memory.—*J. Wilson*

Bethesda Softworks,
(301) 963-2002
PC CD-ROM



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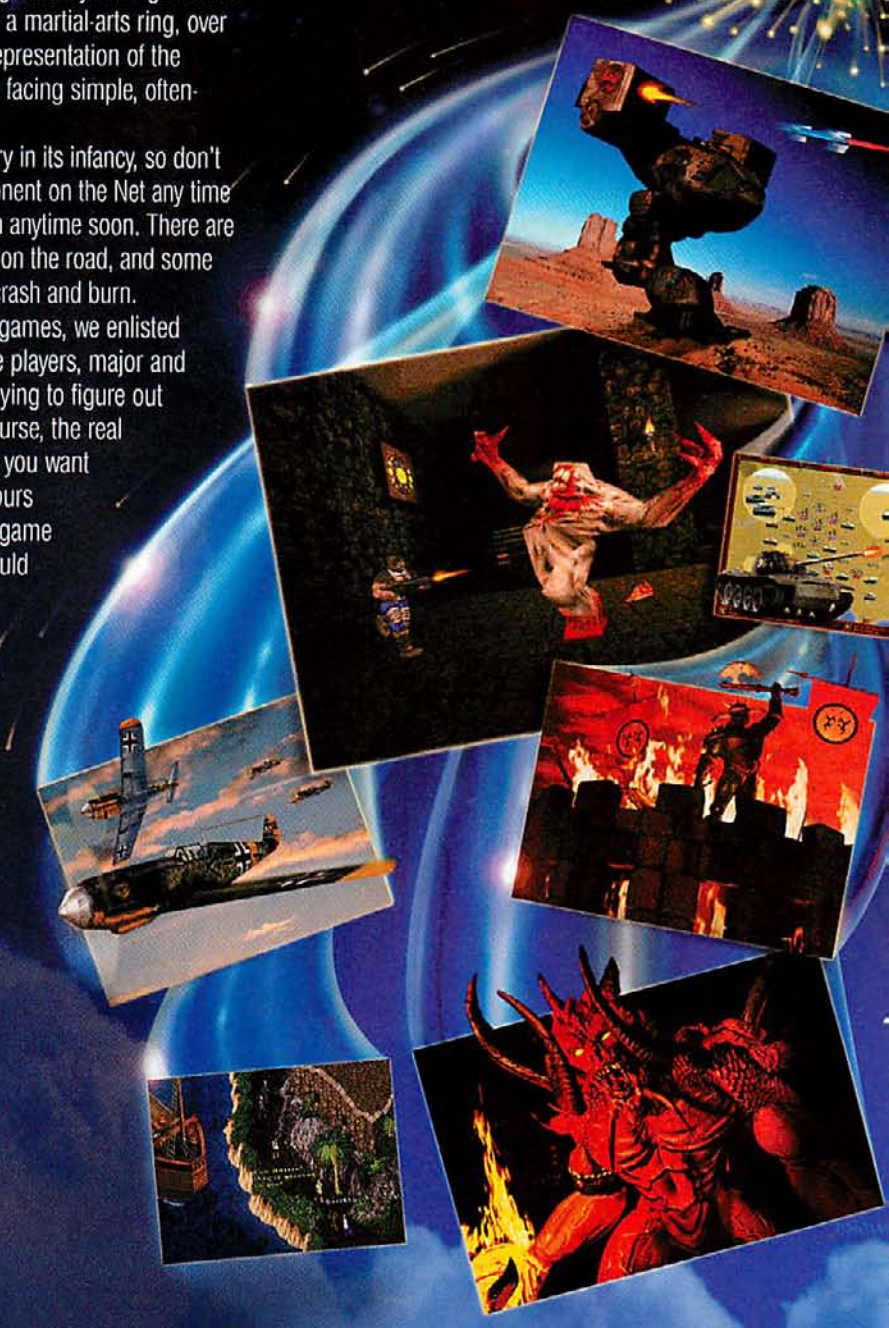
CGW's Guide To The Best In Online Gaming

It's the most hyped new gaming trend since full-motion video, but this time there's some substance to back up the talk. The Internet and the new crop of online gaming services have the potential to change the face of gaming. Once you've gone into a virtual battle—whether it's fought in a martial-arts ring, over 3D Pacific skies, or on a hex-based representation of the Eastern Front—it's hard to go back to facing simple, often-predictable computer players.

However, online gaming is an industry in its infancy, so don't fear that you'll always need to track down a live opponent on the Net any time you want to play a game—that's not going to happen anytime soon. There are plenty of technological and economic bumps ahead on the road, and some of the players in the race for your online dollar may crash and burn.

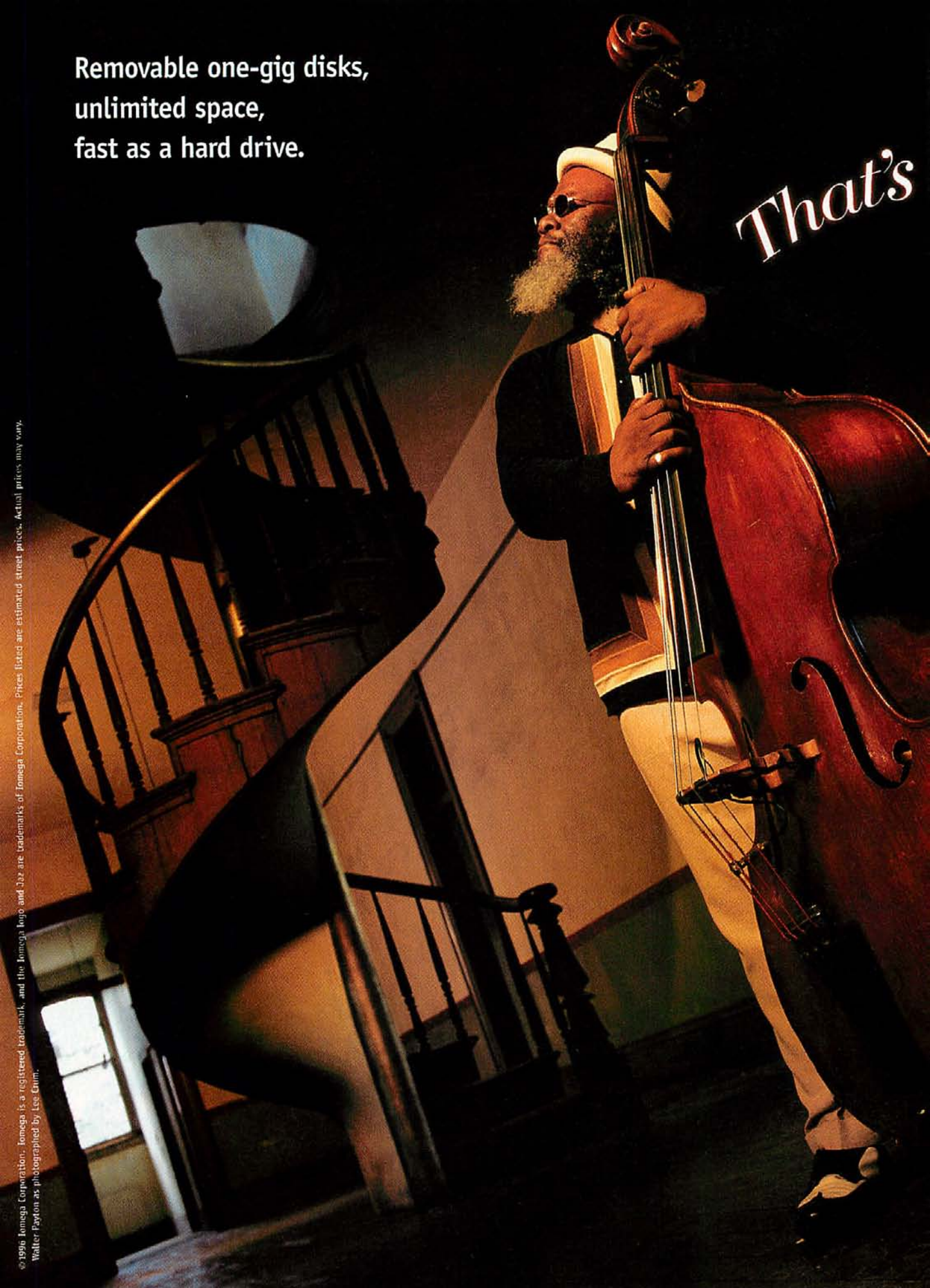
To help guide you safely into the world of online games, we enlisted Net curmudgeon Martin Cirulis to take a look at the players, major and minor, in the nascent Net gaming world. If you're trying to figure out which service to try, give his overview a look. Of course, the real decision boils down to where you'll find the games you want to play. Our crack editorial team spent dozens of hours combing the networks, pilfering software company game plans, and playing as many online games as we could get our hands on, to present you with a list of the best online games, and where to find them. And if you're not on the Net yet, we've also put together a list of the best tools for getting connected.

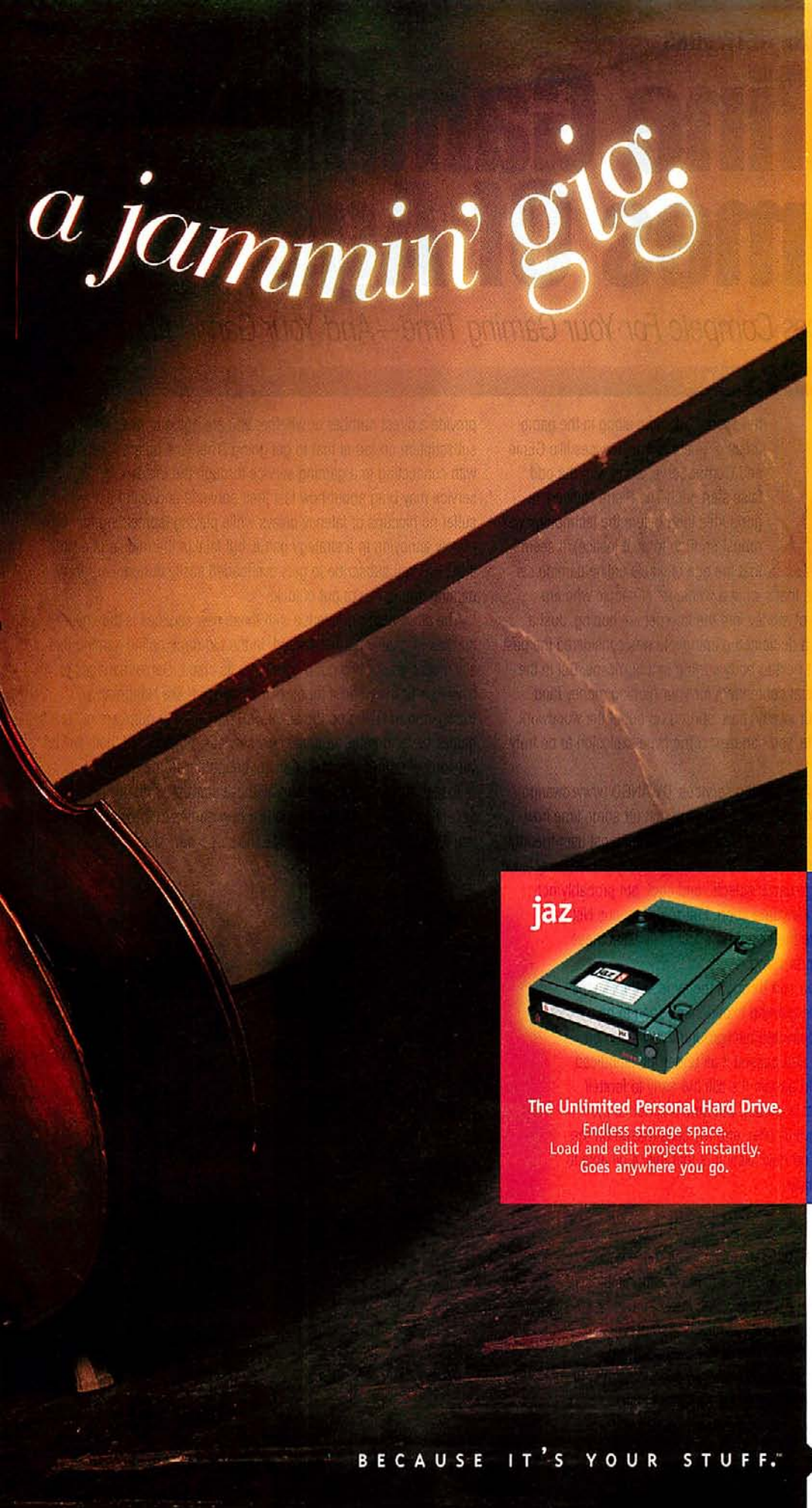
So read on, grab your controller, log on, and prepare to meet the most vicious, unpredictable opponents in the universe—other gamers.



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Online Gaming Comes Of Age

New Services Compete For Your Gaming Time—And Your Gaming Dime

BY MARTIN E. CIRULIS

After years of limping along in the game areas of major online services like GEnie and CompuServe, along with the odd false start such The Sierra Network (a good idea long before the technology was robust enough to do it justice), it seems that the age of viable online gaming services is here. At least, that's what a whole lot of people who are investing a whole lot of money into the Internet are hoping. Just a couple of years ago, a dedicated gaming site was considered the best way to lose your shirt next to body surfing in a hurricane. But in the last few months, several contenders for your gaming money (and more importantly, your loyalty) have sprung up out of the woodwork. Once they're all online, you can expect the hype-explosion to be truly overwhelming.

One of the first online gaming services, DWANGO (www.dwango.com), has been making its way on the Internet for some time now, and it's surviving nicely. Unfortunately, it is not the most user-friendly setup in the world, and some of the new, big-money servers may leave it looking like a garage band: eclectic and cool, but probably not opening for The Who anytime soon. Full-scale, serious Net gaming is going to require the ease and accessibility that these new companies are promising.

In order to help you sort through the hype and make the best of the new online gaming experiences soon to be available, *CGW* has collected background information on the early contenders and passed it all under the jaundiced eye of this grumpy old gamer. It's still too early to foretell the future with perfect accuracy, but here's a look at the players, what they have to offer, and my calls (based on the information at hand) on how likely it is that they'll be able to deliver on their promises.

GETTING WIRED

There are two major differences between these new game services and the older generation. The first is the method of connection. All the new services can be accessed through the Internet; some will also provide direct dial-up access. Services that are only accessible through the net require that you have an account with your own Internet service provider (ISP). You should know whether the money you pay to the game service will provide a direct number or whether you are going to need another subscription on top of that to get going. There's a potential problem with connecting to a gaming service through the Internet: While the service may brag about how fast their server is and claim that you'll suffer no hiccups or latency delays while playing (something that is merely annoying in a strategy game, but fatal in the middle of a sim), if the ISP you subscribe to gets overloaded easily during your prime gaming hours, you're out of luck.

The other major difference with these new services is the sheer number of quality games offered. In the old days, online gaming usually meant one or two good games (to its credit, Genie manages to have four or five), and a lot of mainstream fluff like Hangman and Backgammon taking up the slack. Not only will the numbers of "real" games be far greater on these new services, but most of them will be versions of games you have already bought for home use.

In fact, the great race among all these startup companies is to secure exclusive rights to the hottest new games in the pipeline. You'll make your choice of service the same way you choose a movie



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channel. Who is promising to carry your favorite new titles next month? No longer will you be forced to play a game "just like DUKE NUKEM 3D" online—you'll simply find a service that offers the actual game. The great advantage with this system is that no more expensive hours have to be spent online just learning the game. You can play the game for weeks at home, then hop onto the pay-for-play Web with your skills honed to a razor's edge.

THE BIG THREE

My picks as the best bets in this new battlefield are all services dedicated to gaming and entertainment. More importantly, though, TEN, Mpath and Engage all have deep and extensive experience in real computer gaming—they aren't simply led by a group of suits who have read the top-10 best-selling software list and think "MYST ONLINE" will be the hottest thing since sliced bread. When it comes down to it, I'm far more comfortable supporting people who know and love our hobby, rather than those who are just leaping in to make a quick buck, and the odds of getting what you paid for are much higher when you're dealing with people who know what the heck computer gaming is about.

Total Entertainment Network (TEN): At the moment this is the company to beat in the world of online gaming. TEN (www.ten.net) has been at work preparing for Web gaming since early 1993, and it seems to have the most solid grip on the situation for its planned grand opening on September 1. Unfortunately for the company's corporate future, most of its competitors have timed their own openings to roughly coincide with TEN's debut, so any advantage will soon be lost unless the additional year and a half that TEN has spent preparing for launch is evident to consumers.

This service represents the closest hybrid between past and present. Though it's an Internet-based entity, TEN will retain the direct dial-up capability and full service of the old generation of online providers. For the technical reasons mentioned above, direct-dial-up access from major North American cities will be a great advantage for gamers who are willing to pay the extra amount. With this deal you also get full Internet access as well as unlimited play time, so in the long run it may be the cheaper option.

And speaking of costs, I suspect this factor more than anything else will separate the gamers from the kids on TEN. With an unlimited play rate of $30 per month ($50 with direct access and full Internet capabilities), a year's worth of all the gaming you can stand will be a little steep for the average allowance. Fortunately for the budget conscious, there is an hourly/monthly rate as well: a base charge of $7.50/month, which is applied against a $1.25/hour fee. So basically, your monthly fee gives you six hours, and then you pay extra for any more time you spend—a good deal if you're planning to spend less than 24 a month on the game grid.



FRAGGED! An opponent meets his end in an online "DUKE-match." If your Net connection isn't speedy, jerky movement can add a whole new challenge to action play—a problem all the services are working to minimize.



WELCOME MAT With its point-and-click front-end program, TEN endeavors to make the online gaming experience accessible to newbies and Netheads alike.

The teenage action set may not feel completely at home here, however. Although there will be a nice selection of shoot-'em-ups—this will be the exclusive home to DUKE NUKEM and all the FormGen/3D Realms titles for quite a while—TEN also seem to have a firm commitment to in-depth strategy games. It will feature PANZER GENERAL, DEADLOCK, DEADLY GAMES, COMMAND & CONQUER and WARCRAFT in its initial offering of 10-odd games, while SIM CITY 2000 and MASTER OF ORION 2 also wait in the wings. While they appear to be a little light in the RPG category, with only the SSI leather-fest DARK SUN in the corral at the moment, that's probably going to change as the months pass.

The plan for most titles offered by TEN is to have an icon available that will connect you directly to the network for online play whenever you install an off-the-shelf game under Win 95. Provided you have a TEN account, just double-click the icon and you'll find yourself in a virtual lounge with all sorts of compadres, and you can immediately start looking for opponents. It doesn't get much easier.

By the time you read this, TEN will be available and striving hard to flourish as a pay service, offering a complete entertainment package: not only games, but all the support, strategy and newsgroups needed by the serious gamer. TEN represents an attempt to evolve the reliable infrastructure of the old online services into a more dynamic, gamer-oriented service, which serves the hobby at the same time it profits from it.

Mplayer: If there's a prime contender for TEN's initial lead, it's Mpath Interactive and its online gaming service, Mplayer (www.mplayer.com). Initially, Mplayer seems to be narrower in scope than TEN, choosing to concentrate on optimizing player interaction and speed. While I'm not sure how this is going to enhance strategy titles, it will certainly help to make them paramount in the hearts of action fans.

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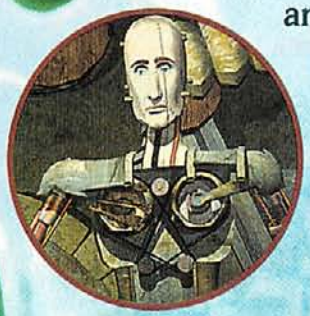
AREA 51
ATLANTIS
BERMUDA TRIANGLE
ILLUMINATI
JFK ASSASSINATION
PHILADELPHIA EXPERIMENT
ROSWELL INCIDENT

HUMAN HISTORY IS A LIE.

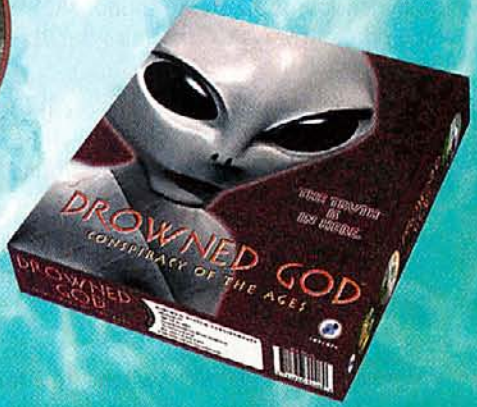
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INSCAPE™



ALL YOU CAN EAT During the beta phases, services such as Mplayer allowed free play; thousands of Internet users happily helped Mplayer test its system load handling.

Mplayer will be a totally Internet-based entity, and you'll need a reliable, fast Internet provider to take maximum advantage of the speed inherent in the setup. (Mplayer recommends using PSINet.) Once you have a provider you can depend on, Mplayer will cost you around $2 an hour. Package rates are yet to be announced, but one can safely assume they will be roughly analogous to those found on TEN.

For your buck, you'll get roughly the same number of games as TEN (perhaps a few less, as it remains to be seen how "exclusive" things will be, and whether Mpath will be able to corral their own loyal stable of developers), and some heavy communication with your opponents. Mplayer will not only provide typed-chat communication but actual voice chat through your microphone and sound card, as well as a virtual chalkboard where gamers will be able to draw diagrams. If they can pull this off with a full load of gamers, it could revolutionize team online play. No more misunderstandings about who was supposed to break left—and far better arguments!

Mplayer should open with 5 to 10 solid titles, with a good mix of action and strategy. QUAKE, TERMINAL VELOCITY and MECHWARRIOR 2 will provide much of the initial firepower. As far as future acquisitions go, things should progress exactly as they will with TEN (in fact many titles, such as DEADLOCK, will ship with both Mplayer and TEN icon links), and the service will acquire new titles with about the same regularity as "sure-fire hits" appear on the shelves. For those of us who remember the old days when a new online game came around only slightly more often than Halley's Comet, this is a grand achievement.

Recent events give Mpath one more ace in the hole, especially where younger gamers are concerned—but it's an ace that may come with a price. Mpath recently acquired Catapult, another fledgling multiplayer gaming service. Catapult, while offering some PC games, is mainly concerned with offering the same wonders we've been discussing to the highly excitable cartridge-game crowd. On the surface this looks like a clever idea, but one has to wonder whether the potentially huge cartridge market will make Mpath more successful than any online service in history or just drown it under a deluge of consumers who all want to play DONKEY-KONG COUNTRY deathmatches, grinding its server system to a halt. Even if the hardware remains totally separate, there is always the danger of personnel and effort being shunted toward the higher-volume cartridge side, and the Mplayer side of the company could slowly dry up—which would be unfortunate, considering its potential.

Just by sheer association, Mplayer could benefit from the Catapult merger and develop a reputation as the home for true action fans. At this point, Mpath is planning to require separate memberships for the services, but it's unlikely that a gamer would sign on to Catapult for their cartridge gaming and then go to some other service for their PC warfare. With the accent on communication and interaction, as well as a system based on bringing as many gamers face to virtual face as possible, Mplayer could be the place for a quick combat fix.

Engage Games Online: The third-most-promising contestant in our cavalcade of opportunity is Engage Games Online (www.gamesonline.com), the service that aims for the broadest and most mature market so far. And, should future laws swing their way, Engage could be sitting on the largest cash cow since a woman looked at her telephone and said, "I wonder if guys'll pay a lot to hear me talk dirty over that thing?"

Of the big three, Engage is the only service founded by an actual gaming company—in this case, Interplay. This setup is great for us (after all, they can't have any shortage of people there who understand gaming), but it may not be good for Engage. Although Interplay did spin the service off as a separate entity, some game companies may be reluctant to sign their titles over to a perceived competitor to



OLD AND NEW Services like Engage will host recent hits such as DESCENT while giving new life to older titles like CASTLES II.

run on their service. As it is, Engage will offer a fairly small but quality plate of Interplay titles, all translated to the multiuser arena, concentrating on strategy (CASTLES 2, DRAGON DICE) and RPGs (MUD II), with a little DESCENT thrown in to spice things up.

Engage has a couple of clever twists that could give it serious legs with the mainstream community. First of all, while the service will be part of the Internet-access bunch, Engage has also penned deals to be directly accessible by AOL and Prodigy users at no extra fee—



TOWN SQUARE Chat rooms, such as this DUKE chat on TEN, will allow players to get help and even form online communities.

becoming, in essence, the entertainment provider to the huge population that still subscribes to the previous generation of online services. The other shrewd move from Engage is that their entertainment services will not be limited to the games played by those of us indulging their inner children. Deals have been cut to produce online versions of the House of Blues and Caesar's World (as in Caesar's Palace). If online gambling laws should ever change, the revenue spawned by the virtual Vegas games could bring Engage enough money to build their own time machine to research CASTLES III.

While I suspect Engage will not become *the* place to go for fast and furious die-hard gamers, the service's mainstream appeal has potential not only for financial success, but as an excellent platform to bring new people into the hobby. This is never a bad thing for the rest of us. A person whose only experience with social computer gaming experience is Microsoft HEARTS might be intimidated into immobility by CONFIRMED KILL, but they can be lured comfortably into the fold by a quick game of DRAGON DICE, on their way out the door after checking the scene at the House of Blues.

THE OLD GANG

The traditional online services (AOL, CompuServe, Prodigy and the undead Genie) should soon be paying increased attention to social gaming—partly due to the perceived competition from the new Internet entities but mainly because of the dawning realization that these games could be the hook that brings in more subscribers, who will end up having to purchase extra hours to feed their habits. There's great hope that this could be the trick to turn these monoliths of dubious profitability into solid moneymakers.

While CompuServe is expanding its gaming area and Prodigy is planning to do so through Engage access, it's AOL that seems to be pursuing the golden goose of gaming most vigorously. Not only will the service offer games from Engage, but it's also bought up just about every traditional online game that was already out there—to the point that the new AOL lineup contains just about every good game that Genie ever provided. To show they are really serious about this online gaming scene, AOL recently acquired the ImagiNation Network, the never-very-successful prototype for these new services that began life as The Sierra Network.

Unfortunately, no matter how great the response we see now from the old generation, they'll always have the same problem they've always had with their gaming areas: the simple fact that the people who make crucial decisions on content and resources generally have no experience with the computer game industry and no interest in the hobby beyond pure exploitation. This problem will continue to produce such embarrassments as weekend-long VIRTUAL PICTIONARY tournaments, because "that is what people are playing, isn't it?"

This kind of thinking can even be a problem for new Internet gaming services like VR-1 (www.vr1.com). VR-1 seems to talk a good fight, but on close examination the company has a board of directors with only one member with gaming experience. Despite VR-1's lack of experience with gaming, the company has a healthy respect for the money to be made from gamers. Unfortunately, a quick review of their current game offerings indicates a staff with a good grasp of PR but an unfortunate tendency to reinvent games that have already been done or to make plans so vague that the title in question could be anything. They do show a wonderful sense of the gimmick, though, and their "First Digital Comics" series is interesting. The service should have a good novelty factor, if it survives.

Services need to look at what gamers want, but they also should be careful not to be too narrow in their focus. MPG Net (www.mpgn.com) has held its own for quite a while with exclusive multiplayer online strategy and wargames, as well as the KINGDOM OF DRAKKAR adventure. However, with services popping up with wide focuses and commercial-quality games, MPG Net may have to widen its appeal to remain competitive.

JOINING THE PARTY

The fallout from the business community's new perception of online gaming—that it will be a quick source of revenue—is that some game companies see it as an excellent way to keep their titles hot in an industry in which last month's stuff is ancient history. There's a pack of software companies that are thinking of throwing their own servers up on the Web (albeit in a much more limited way than Interplay) so you can go directly to them and play their games. While the logic seems to be that the company has the best understanding of



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ULTIMATE EVIL While playing the alpha version of Ultima Online, a player gloats over a slaying. Without the lofty, aspiring-to-goodness goals of the boxed games, your online personas can be as bad as they wanna be.

how its own games should be presented, I think the reality is that these companies want their own pieces of the online pie.

GTE is planning its own large online game called Siege, and Blizzard is considering an Internet platform to showcase its fine multiplayer titles. Origin seems to have the clearest focus with Ultima Online, which will deliver a huge, dynamic CRPG based on its immortal Ultima series. Here, players will be able to wander about a landscape so large that it could take eight hours just to walk a character from one side to the other. But it's not just size that could make this the most important step in the evolution of the CRPG prior to the invention of the holodeck—it's the level of planned "reality" built into the world, with everything from weather patterns to seasons, flowing around an ecosystem where players could just as easily stumble across an orc battling a hobgoblin as they could a pirate raid, and where both combats would continue even if the player runs away. Players would gain access to this new world with the purchase of the Ultima Online CD from a retail store, and then simply link up with hundreds of others to write virtual history in Britannia. At the moment, though, there are no concrete plans to give any other Origin property this same kind of treatment.

Some of us will probably say "the more than merrier," but I have two problems with this "us too" approach to online gaming. The first is that smaller companies may rob themselves of manpower or even bankrupt themselves on a risky investment, which may never do anything except drain money. I am sure there are few tears at Sierra over unloading the ImagiNation Network.

The other problem is that these attempts to reinvent the wheel could reduce the variety of games on the services that already exist. If everyone tries to serve up their own games, the only way for them to survive would be to keep their titles to themselves. This would mean that consumers could have to sign up to 10 different servers to get the mix of games they want. And that, I suspect, is just not going to happen—with the result being a serious stumble for the whole online gaming industry. Ideally, I think it will be healthier to have a half-dozen services, with dozens of games each, rather than 40 half-capable services with three games each.

But all is not lost. Even companies that are not planning large server projects are still planning to invest effort in the production of online games to be marketed by hungry gaming services. 3DO, which already supports a server for its first-person RPG Meridian 59, is planning to put even more effort into the creation of properties to be run from larger services. Next year should see the company firmly establishing itself as a supplier of online titles.

WHERE TO SIGN UP

Two things are sure in the burgeoning online gaming industry. First, there will be at least as many losers and "nice tries" as there will be winners. Second, there will be things going wrong (and right!) that nobody has even remotely foreseen yet.

Given this, the best advice I can give for the next year or so is to be cautious and don't let initial problems get you down. The smaller the service you are attracted to, the less of a long-term commitment you should make. You don't want your $200 full-year subscription fee to buy you an "out of business" sign four months later. Also, some smaller servers may end up being swallowed by the bigger fish, and you don't want to end up in a system you never planned on joining. At this point, I'd sign up for at least one of The Big Three, and keep an eye on the smaller servers that offer truly unique, advanced gaming, like Ultima Online.

I'm thrilled with new advances in Internet technology, which will allow real-time voice chatting while gaming, and even with the "floating head" 3D chat rooms that 3-D Live Technologies is working on. But I'm not sure anyone has worked out the social dynamic of these things. For those of us who have seen the ego wars that rage through newsgroups and in Duke Nukem 3D deathmatch waiting rooms, there's some trepidation over having the whole scene be that much more in your face. Never mind the problems parents will have finding a civilized place for their younger teens to play SimCity 2000.

THE REAL DRAW

With most of the servers offering many of the same games and certainly covering the same gaming bases (strategy, action, RPG), the most popular sites will probably be the ones that manage to create a sense of community.

If there is a lesson to be drawn from other Net-communities, whether they're focused on the environment, music or nude beach volleyball, it's that folks will probably want to stop by for a quick game and chat in a Net place "where everybody knows your name." Online gaming execs would be smart to realize that the ImagiNation Network never broke out because of too few cutting-edge titles, too many card games, and too much "cute." But INN's attempt to create a gaming "town" was a good idea. Net gamers are just aching to be part of a tribe. They argue passionately based on their allegiance to various games, companies and types of hardware. The first one to give them a place to call their own will probably come out on top in the end.

"ABSOLUTE GARBAGE."

—Slime Magazine

"PURE TRASH."

—Ratweek

"P.U."

—The Daily Urinal

"IT STINKS."

—The Sunday Compost

"TWO THUMBS UP (OUR NOSES)."

—Fungus & Mildew



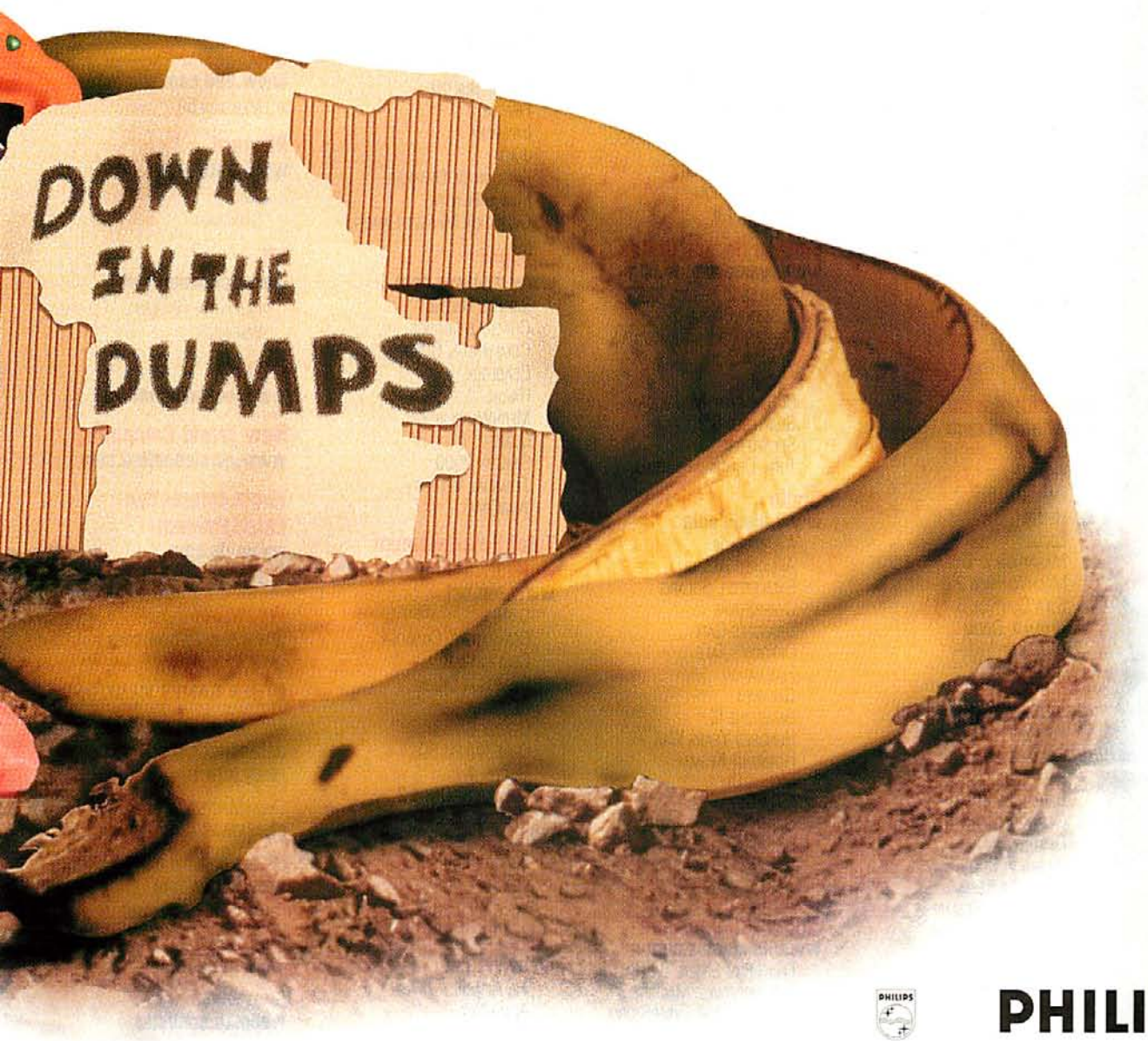
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Playing Soon On A Net Near You

Here's a list of the gaming services mentioned throughout this feature, along with the URL to access each from your Web browser. We've also included lists of the games announced for each service. Some are active already, while many others have been announced for future availability. In the fast-paced world of online gaming, new games are becoming active each week. For instance, as this article went to press, TEN had only Duke Nukem 3D, Dark Sun Online, Warcraft, and Command & Conquer "live," but by the time you read this, Panzer General, Deadlock, Necrodome, and a number of other games should be available. So hit the Web and find out what's playing!

SERVICES MENTIONED

AOL
www.aol.com
- AD&D Neverwinter Nights
- Air Warrior
- Black Bayou
- Casino Poker
- Federation
- Gemstone III
- Gemstone: Dragon Realms
- Legends of Kesmai
- Modus Operandi
- NTN Trivia
- President '96
- The Realm
- Trivial Pursuit Interactive

Catapult/X-Band
www.xband.com
- Doom II
- Final Doom
- Hardball 5
- Hexen
- Locus
- Marathon 2: Durandal
- MechWarrior 2
- Star Control 3
- Ultimate Doom
- WarCraft

CompuServe
www.compuserve.com
- Air Warrior
- Barbarossa
- Battletech: Solaris
- British Legends
- Casino Poker
- Destiny Online
- Harpoon Online
- Island of Kesmai
- Legends of Kesmai
- MegaWars I and III
- Sniper
- Star Rangers

DWANGO
www.dwango.com
- Big Red Racing
- Descent II
- Doom
- Doom II
- Duke Nukem 3D
- Final Doom
- Heretic
- Hexen
- Terminal Velocity
- Ultimate Doom
- WarCraft II

Engage Games Online
www.gamesonline.com
- Castles 2
- Descent Online
- Descent to Undermountain
- Dragon Dice
- Mud II
- Rolemaster: Magestorm
- Shattered Steel
- Splatterball
- Total Control Football

Genie
www.genie.com
- Air Warrior
- Armored Assault
- Battletech: Solaris
- CyberStrike
- Dragon's Gate
- Dragon's Tale
- Federation
- Galaxy I
- Gemstone III
- Hundred Years War
- Island of Kesmai
- Modus Operandi
- NTN Trivia
- Orb Wars
- RSCards
- Stellar Emporer

ImagiNation Network/CyberPark
www.inngames.com
- Front Page Sports: Baseball Pro
- The Incredible Machine 3
- MissionForce: CyberStorm
- Red Baron II
- Trophy Bass 2

MPG Net
www.mpgn.com
- Backgammon
- Empire Builder
- Fiefquest
- Imperium
- Junta
- Kingdom of Drakkar
- Minion Hunter
- Operation Market Garden

Mplayer
www.mplayer.com
- Big Red Racing
- Chaos Overlords
- Command & Conquer
- Deadlock
- Havoc
- MechWarrior 2
- Quake
- SimCity 2000
- Terminal Velocity
- WarCraft

Total Entertainment Network (TEN)
www.ten.net
- CivNet
- Command & Conquer
- Confirmed Kill
- Dark Sun Online
- Deadlock
- Deadly Games
- Duke Nukem 3D
- Falcon 4
- Master of Orion 2
- Necrodome
- Panzer General
- SimCity 2000
- Terminal Velocity
- WarCraft

VR-1
www.vr1.com
- Air Attack
- ArachNet
- The RIFT
- The SARAC Project

COMPANIES MENTIONED

3DO
www.3do.com/studio3do
- Meridian 59

Blizzard
www.battle.net
- Diablo
- Starcraft

ICI
www.icigames.com
- Planetary Raiders
- Warbirds

Kesmai
www.kesmai.com

New World Computing
www.nwcomputing.com

Virgin Interactive Entertainment
www.vie.com
- SubSpace

Westwood
www.westwood.com

OTHER GAMES MENTIONED

Age of Discovery **www.islandnet.com/~dgreenin/emg.htm**

ChessMaster 5000 **www.chessmasternetwork.com**

ESPN Sportsnet **espnet.sportszone.com**
Fantasy sports leagues

President '96 **www.pres96.com**

Stars **www.webmap.com/star**

Ultima Online **www.owo.com**

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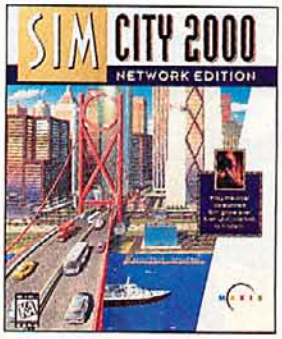


Player 1 is the server that brings the players together—before trying to bring them to their knees in a mad scramble for power.

Player 2 surveys the city looking for suggestions he can make to the group on how best to beautify their burgeoning burg.

Player 3 is in the midst of heated negotiations with Player 1 that could bring some much-needed revenue to her district.

Player 4 checks out the new stadium and power plant he shrewdly got approved at the city's last real-time town meeting.



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Hot-Wired Wizards

Gandalf From Brooklyn, Meet Doofus From Berkeley

BY JEFF GREEN

Arise, ye weary role-players, the Dark Ages of the RPG are about to end. After a long, dismal drought in new gaming experiences, the coming year is shaping up to be one of the best ever. Along with the release of oft-delayed, hotly anticipated games like DAGGERFALL and RETURN TO KRONDOR, a virtual explosion in multiplayer online RPGs will give you the chance to quest and combat with fellow role-players the world over.

Of course, since online RPGs have been around since the dawn of the computer age, they're not exactly big news. What *is* new—and exciting—is that they are no longer solely text-based dungeon romps created and played by sleepless college kids. Realizing the potential to hook a vast, dedicated, worldwide audience, major game companies are now scrambling over each other to establish a beachhead online—some continuing popular franchises that began in boxed games, others creating entirely new online worlds.

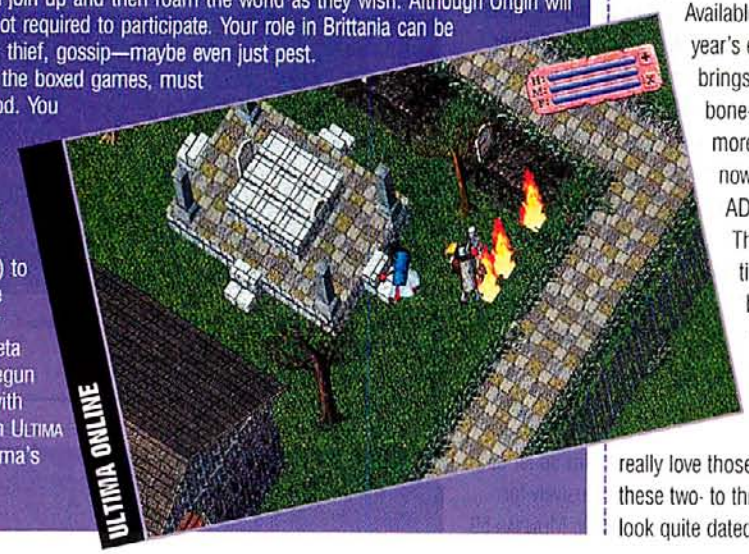
The audience is definitely there. Many of the new online RPGs have collected thousands of dedicated players before even reaching the beta stage. What these gamers are discovering is that the Internet is returning to the genre the key element that attracted and sustained role-playing enthusiasts in the first place: human interaction. Unlike a computer AI, human players provide gameplay that is original, fresh and unpredictable every time you log on. With companies promising ever-evolving worlds with new quests and characters constantly added to the mix, online RPGs just might be the holy grail of imaginative computer role-playing. Here's a rundown of some of the hottest titles in development so far.

For AD&D fans, the big news in online gaming is SSI's DARK SUN ONLINE, the company's last scheduled AD&D product. Available exclusively on TEN by year's end, DARK SUN ONLINE brings you back to the bad-ass, bone-dry world of Athas for more magic and mayhem, only now you can explore it with AD&D fans the world over. The game, in beta at press time, closely resembles the boxed DARK SUN games, with the same overhead view and interface. This isn't particularly great news, however, unless you really love those games, as the graphics in these two- to three-year-old games now look quite dated. As befits the war-torn

Brittonia Rises Again

Perhaps the most eagerly awaited—and most promising—multiplayer online RPG is Origin's Ultima Online, which will open and expand Lord British's legendary Brittania to Internet gamers around the world. The game introduces a new Ultima engine with an isometric view and 16-bit color—not a revamped Ultima 8 engine, as reported elsewhere—so this should be a brand-new experience. Nonetheless, anyone who's played the boxed Ultimas will find some familiar sites in this online world, as 16 of the cities from the original games will reappear here. Your character can only be human, but you will have multiple professions to choose from. The game will also be skill, rather than level, based; you'll need to learn and practice attack, defense, spell and artisan skills to better your character's standing.

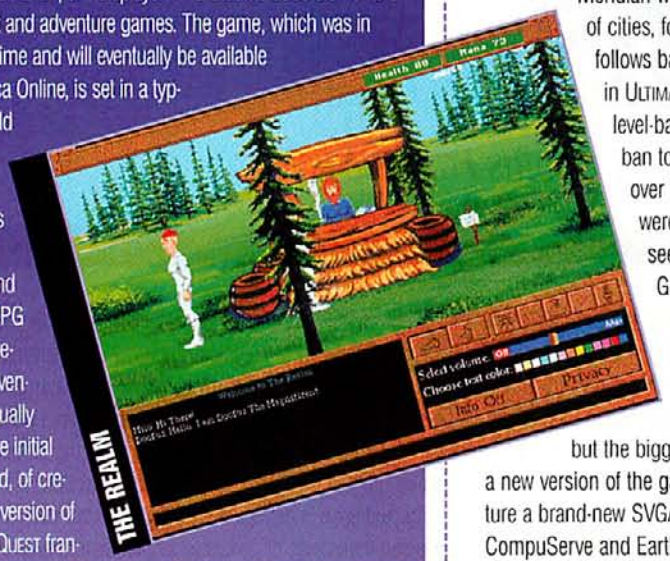
The most exciting thing about ULTIMA ONLINE is that it's ever-changing and completely open-ended; gamers can join up and then roam the world as they wish. Although Origin will supply quests, you are not required to participate. Your role in Brittania can be whatever you like: trader, thief, gossip—maybe even just pest. Nor, in a departure from the boxed games, must you commit to Avatarhood. You can dedicate yourself instead to criminal behavior and be as bad as you want to be; it will be up to the player community (and NPC guards) to enforce order. Players are encouraged to form their own guilds; during the beta test many had already begun to spring up, complete with Web pages. (For more on ULTIMA ONLINE, see Paul Schuytema's column on page 131.)





Quest And Quarrel

Sierra On-Line is jumping back into the online gaming world with THE REALM, a multiplayer RPG that includes elements of combat and adventure games. The game, which was in alpha at press time and will eventually be available through America Online, is set in a typical fantasy world of magic and monsters, though Sierra is attempting to reach out beyond the hard-core RPG set to grab more mainstream adventure fans. (It actually evolved from the initial idea, since killed, of creating an online version of Sierra's KING'S QUEST franchise.) With high-quality graphics, a simple interface and the promise of open-ended adventuring from a company that *knows* adventuring, this has the potential to be one of the stronger online titles.



DARK SUN world, SSI has said that DSO will be heavy on combat and full of monsters, though the city of Tyr will be a (mostly) safe zone. It won't all be hostile though—gamers can organize into groups and guilds, or even just blab with one another through a well-implemented chat zone.

Blizzard's action-RPG, DIABLO, will also be an Internet-playable game. This title, with its slick interface, beautiful graphics and atmosphere, and fast action, might put off a few traditionalists, but it's sure to win over most of the RPG crowd and draw in a raft of action and WARCRAFT II fans. With tons of spells, monsters and NPCs and a database of 30 miniquests—6 to 8 of which are randomly generated per game—DIABLO is sure to reignite a passion for role-playing games, especially given its multiplayer options. Along with LAN and modem play, DIABLO will support up to four players per game over Blizzard's new online gaming service, battle.net, which will debut in late September at the same time DIABLO ships. All you'll need is an ISP and the game. Simply click on a button in the DIABLO main menu and you'll be taken to battle.net, where you can adventure in the dungeons of DIABLO with friends or strangers of different skills. The game will support simple deathmatch play but is best when you follow a four-player cooperative campaign through the whole game.

ANOTHER WORLD

3DO's MERIDIAN 59 is one of the best examples so far of a graphics-based fantasy RPG world created exclusively for online play. Unlike the games discussed thus far, MERIDIAN 59 uses a first-person 3D perspective, which, along with relatively complex movement, creates an impressively immersive environment. Whether the gameplay matches the environment remains to be seen, as the game is still in beta, but our experience was pretty good. The Meridian world itself feels huge, with a mixed environment of cities, forests, mountains, rivers and more. The game follows basic RPG conventions of character creation; as in ULTIMA ONLINE, improvement is skill-based (rather than level-based). Gamers can create independent guilds to ban together for common goals. In its beta stage, over 35 guilds—completely independent of 3DO—were up already, many with their own Web sites. (To see a cool example, check out the Dragon Order Guild at home.sprynet.com/sprynet/zexor.)

Another company that knows adventuring is Kesmai, who for years has been entertaining gamers online with the classic multiplayer RPG, ISLAND OF KESMAI. That game still exists, but the bigger news is that the company is now working on a new version of the game, called LEGENDS OF KESMAI, which will feature a brand-new SVGA graphics front end. Available soon for AOL, CompuServe and EarthLink, LEGENDS OF KESMAI will allow hundreds of users to simultaneously explore the world as never before.

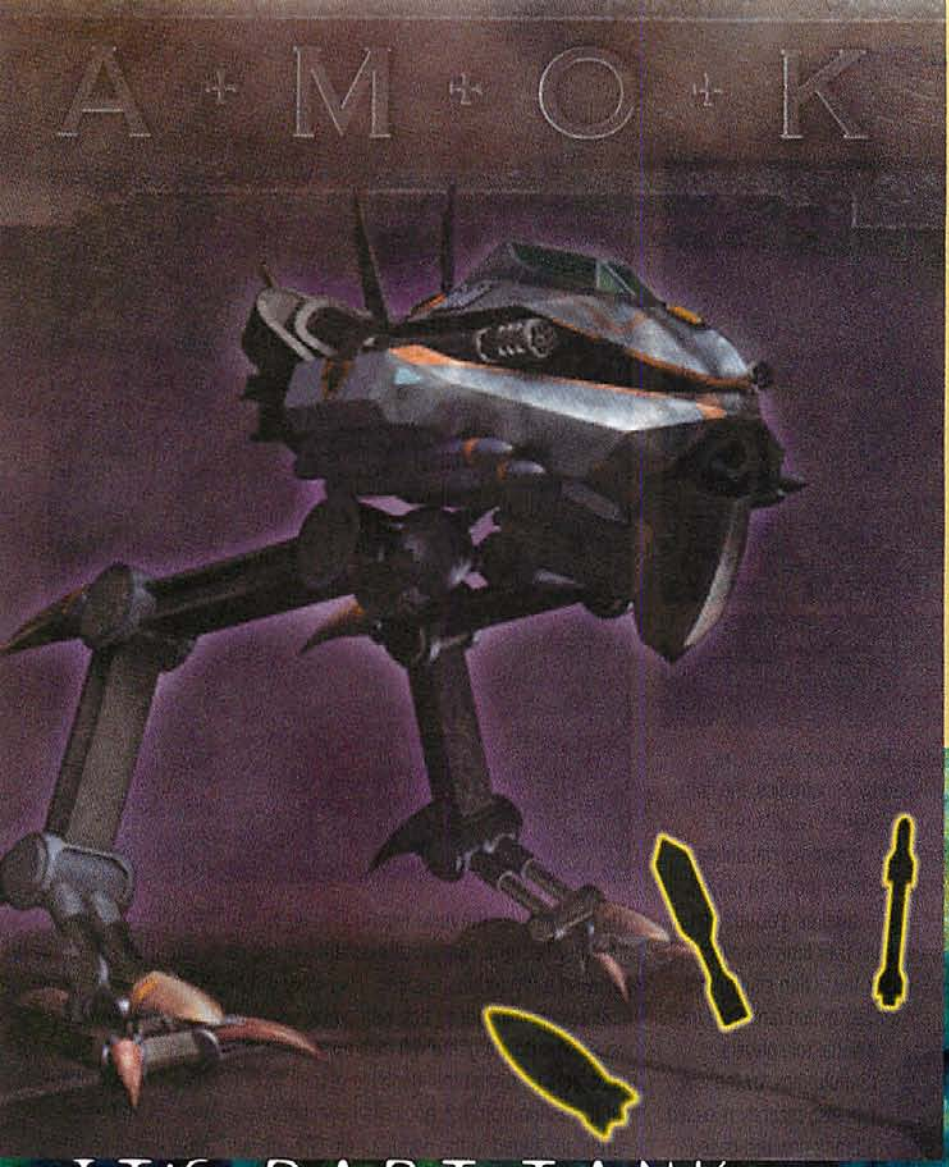
SPELL BOUND

Two other online-only RPGs combine elements of roleplaying with first-person 3D-shooter action. ROLEMASTER: MAGESTORM, being developed by Interworld Productions exclusively for Engage, allows up to 40 players in three teams to attempt to conquer each other's shrines. Sounds like capture the flag? Well, it is, sort of—except that players can assume the role of clerics, mentalists or mages to vary their experience and contributions to the game. Though character attributes are editable and players will gain experience over time, traditional RPGers might find this too lightweight and action oriented; the game could be more successful with devotees of fantasy games like HERETIC.



RATS IN WONDERLAND AD&D fans will want to check out the multiplayer incarnation of the scorched world of Athas in the new DARK SUN ONLINE.

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DEM BONES One of the season's hottest games, DIABLO, will be even hotter online, where multiple players can dismember skeletons together in the name of global interaction.

In a similar vein is Viacom New Media's ARCHMAGE: WAR OF THE WIZARDS, a Windows 95 title being developed by Simutronics, the company behind the immensely popular text-based RPG, GEMSTONE III. ARCHMAGE, which is scheduled to be available on commercial online services by year's end, will pit two teams of wizards (up to 16 players total) against each other in a battle over crystal spheres. Wizards can collect up to 50 spells, and can gain experience over time to collect enough power to become an archmage. Again, the action slant might make this a game that will appeal more to fantasy action fans than traditional role-players. (Simutronics, by the way, has also recently released a brand-new text-based RPG called DRAGON REALMS, now available on AOL.)



NICE, UM, PANTS A character in GTE's upcoming SIEGE, drawn by comic book artist Jim Lee.

A third action-oriented RPG, and perhaps the most intriguing of the lot—especially for comic book fans—is SIEGE, a joint venture from GTE Entertainment and WildStorm Productions (home of artist Jim Lee and creators of the Wildcats and Gen 13 comic books, among others). This Internet-based multiplayer game will combine RPG and 3D-shooter action in an ongoing story that will take place simultaneously on the Internet and in a published comic book. The plot involves the misadventures of an elite military tactical team after they become "genetically enhanced" (we don't dare guess how) following a mysterious mission. This story will begin life as a comic book released in December, with a new issue to follow every six weeks. The online game will pick up where the story leaves off, with users able to inhabit the identities of their favorite characters and play out the action from the book. As new characters, weapons and scenarios are added to the comic book, GTE will add these elements to the game. Sounds odd, to be sure, but from oddness, Frodo, great things often come.

At press time, new online RPGs seemed to be cropping up faster than we could type them up. We'll keep you apprised of the latest and greatest developments in upcoming issues.

MUDs In Your Eye

Role-playing over the Internet has been alive and well for years in the form of hundreds of text-based games called MUDs (multiuser dungeons), each a self-contained world with its own culture, customs and social structures. MUDs can be so complex and involving that they've been known to completely swallow gamers' lives (which, of course, we would never condone here), and there are so many to choose from now that they're likely to still be around long after everything else in this section has come and gone, and possibly up until cockroaches (or apes) take over the planet. This is essentially a long-winded way of saying that, if you're interested, you're going to need to check them out yourself, since we couldn't possibly cover them all here, even if we weren't so long winded. But we can at least point you in the right direction.

Possibly the best source for MUD listings is Lydia Leong's Web site (www.cis.upenn.edu/~lwl/mudinfo.html), from which you can access her huge MUD Resource Collection (a list of of links to MUD sites) and MUD Home Page Links, which features a huge list of MUDs classified by genre. You might also want to check out the Usenet newsgroup rec.games.mud for late-breaking MUD announcements.



FRIED WIZARD SANDWICH Fireballs are just one of the weapons in your arsenal in Viacom's ARCHMAGE: WAR OF THE WIZARDS, an action-oriented RPG for commercial online services due later this year.

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Connect, Twitch, and Splatter

Online Gaming Services Offer An Action-Intensive Lineup

BY ELLIOTT CHIN

Action games are one of the most requested types of games online, but unfortunately they don't lend themselves to the Net. At least, not yet. There is still the issue of latency over the Internet, which could cut the frame rates of games that usually run at a minimum 20 frames per second in half. Still, there is a huge demand for action games online, as evinced by the thousands of gamers who daily brave horrid latency delays and expensive phone bills to play QUAKE and DUKE NUKEM 3D over the Internet.

While the technology hasn't quite come up to speed, there is a still a good variety of action games on the Internet. If you're a gamer with a twitch-and-flex itch, I'm sure you'll find something that turns you on.

IMPENDING DOOM

QUAKE's ancestor, DOOM, is the progenitor of the current multiplayer action craze. DOOM and all its incarnations are also available for play over the Internet, either through the online gaming service DWANGO or on servers created by the countless DOOM freaks still fragging away on the Net. HEXEN and HERETIC, two DOOM clones developed by Raven Software that skirt the edge of role-playing with fantasy themes, can also be played over DWANGO.

SSI will also be releasing a 3D first-person shooter called NECRODOME, a mix of DOOM and

The Kings of Action

There's endless debate about which game is better—QUAKE or DUKE NUKEM 3D—but something all parties agree on is that both games command huge followings over the Internet. Both have a variety of multiplayer options, such as direct connection, modem and LAN play and, of course, Internet gaming. DUKE is available for play over TEN and DWANGO; it's not designed to be played directly over the Internet. QUAKE, on the other hand, can be played directly over the Internet *without* a gaming service, as any player can start a server for the game. As for online gaming services, Mplayer will be the only one offering QUAKE, since it has an exclusive on the title.



QUAKE



DUKE NUKEM 3D

The best multiplayer QUAKE, though, is yet to come. In addition to letting anyone with an Internet connection play QUAKE, id will also offer a virtual database where all deathmatches and frags can be recorded, for gamers anywhere to see and aspire to. John Carmack, id's chief programmer, is also working on a revision to speed up gameplay and cut down on latency. See this month's first "Quake Cheats & Tips" column on page 178 for QuakeWorld details.



Circle Reader Service #82

Spacewar! Grows Up

Sometimes it's the simple things that grab you. SubSpace, for instance, doesn't have stunning graphics or a complicated set of missions, but it's pretty addicting anyway. Players log on, choose a name, select one of four ships, decide which arena is seeing the most action, and jump right into the fray. Upon entering a zone, the player is assigned to a squadron. You fly around, picking up powerups and blasting away at anyone except teammates (or at them too, if you want to be unpopular). Players get points for kills based on their opponents' bounty. Because a new player's bounty is small, more-advanced players will tend to leave him alone until his skill—and kill value—increases. After racking up a certain number of points, players are invited to enter the elite zones.

SubSpace is very easy to learn, but provides enough depth to keep things interesting. The variety of ships and weapons, and the clever touches like being able to piggyback with a squadmate, let more strategy-minded pilots rack up points right along with the top guns. Chat mode lets a player broadcast messages to the entire zone, or chat privately with his squadron or an individual. Spirited trash-talkers may also program their taunts as macros. Many players have formed tournament leagues, complete with elaborate Web sites.



With emphasis on the functional rather than the flashy, SubSpace's latency was quite good in the beta version we played. Even at modem speeds under 14.4 Kbps, ship handling was excellent, and even though opponents sometimes jumped around, they could still be targeted fairly easily. Though the graphics were still being revised at press time, the tradeoff in speedy gameplay will be negligible. SubSpace is available only on the Windows 95 platform, and requires an Internet connection. See www.vie.com for more information on downloading the current version.—*Kate Hedstrom*


Javelin


Warbird


Spider

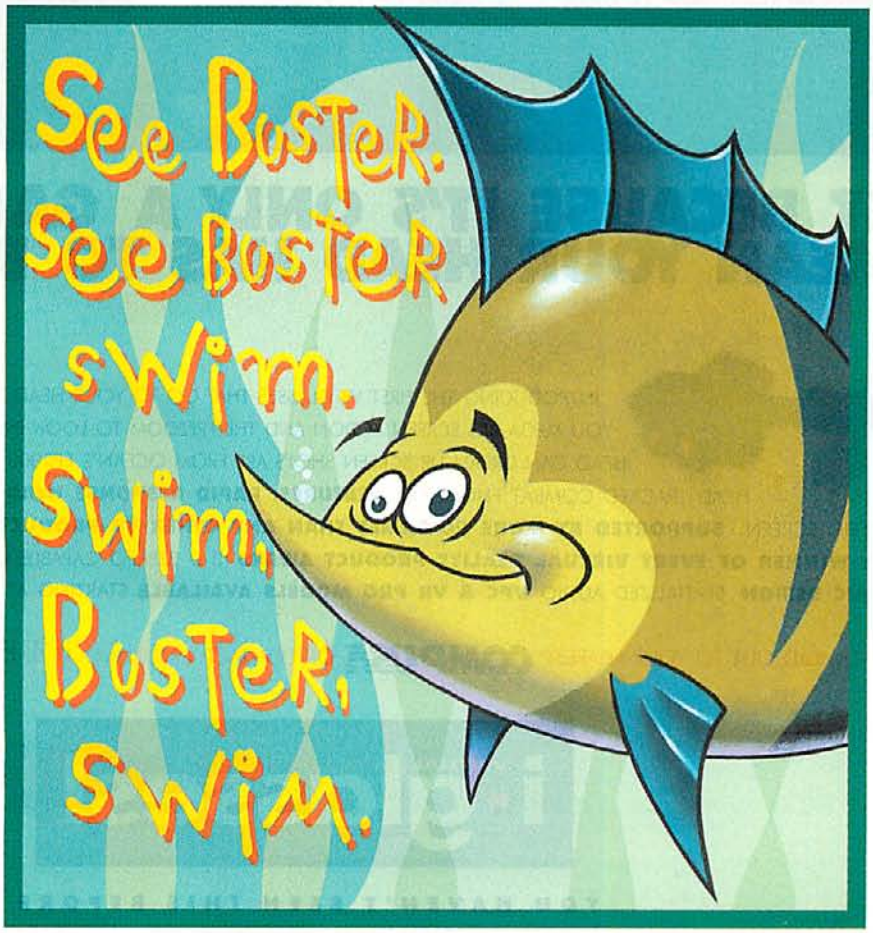

Leviathan



"If you're a gamer with a twitch-and-flex itch, you'll find something that turns you on, on the Internet."

the PlayStation's Twisted Metal. You'll get to alternately mow down people from your car and on foot with a variety of weapons, over a variety of levels where you can also blow up in-game objects and scar the landscape. Necrodome will be available for play over TEN in September.

Engage, a new online gaming service with its roots in Interplay, will also be offering up its fair share of hot action games. Of course, Interplay's flagship



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SET A DATE YET? Interplay's hot action title, DESCENT, will appear exclusively on Engage, for eight-player deathmatches with new ships and levels.

action title, DESCENT ONLINE, will be playable over this gaming service, and will offer two new ships, the Aggressor Prime and The Tigg, in deathmatch mode or team play.

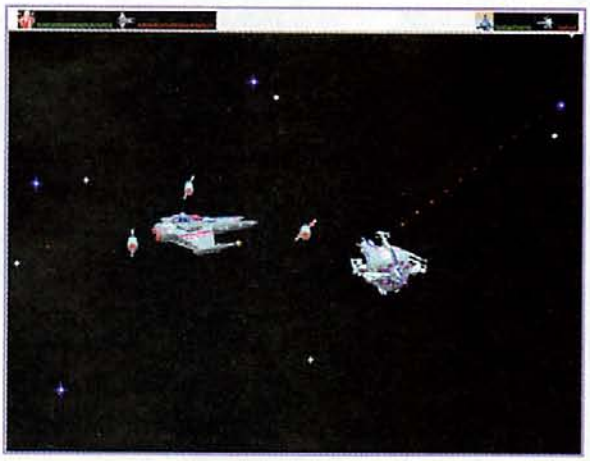
DESCENT TO UNDERMOUNTAIN, a 3D action game set in the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* universe, will also be playable over Engage. It uses the DESCENT 3D engine to propel the player into a series of underground dungeons, and will allow multiple gamers to venture into the dark dungeons of Undermountain together to defeat the Dark Elf Goddess Lloth. For those with an eye less toward cooperation and more toward bloodshed, there will also be deathmatch play. Action in this title is much more visceral, as you engage dark elves, ogres, trolls, and a menagerie of other fantastic AD&D creatures in melees with swords and magic. Engage should go live at the end of this year, debuting with a dozen games, among them DESCENT ONLINE and possibly DESCENT TO UNDERMOUNTAIN.

THE GRAB BAG

Among the other action games available online are stand-alone games that have online play options, as well as games exclusive to the Internet.

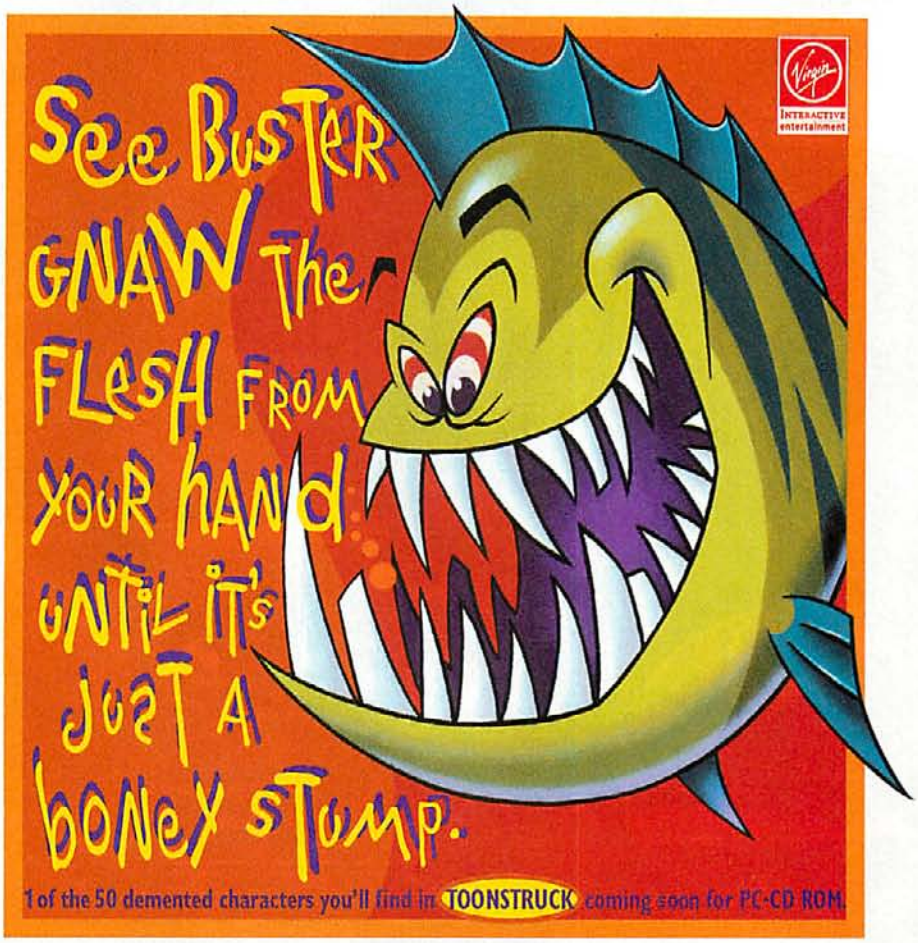
SUBSPACE, a top-down space shooting game, is part of the latter. Created by Virgin's Burst development team, it's reminiscent of the ancient ASTEROIDS or STAR CONTROL's Hyper Melee. Dozens of players can be engaged in a single game at one time, and with its ease of control, 2D graphics and low system overhead, it's designed to be a fast, simple game that's easy to pick up (see the "SPACEWAR! Grows Up" sidebar).

Though not technically an action game, the action portion of STAR CONTROL 3, Hyper Melee, will be playable online, over Xband's Catapult gaming service. Look for the full product to finally ship in November.



LIMITED MAYHEM Only the Hyper Melee portion of STAR CONTROL 3 will be online on XBand's Catapult gaming service. Alas, since Hyper Melee only offers STAR CON 3 ships, some STAR CON 2 vessels, like the Yehat, will be left out.



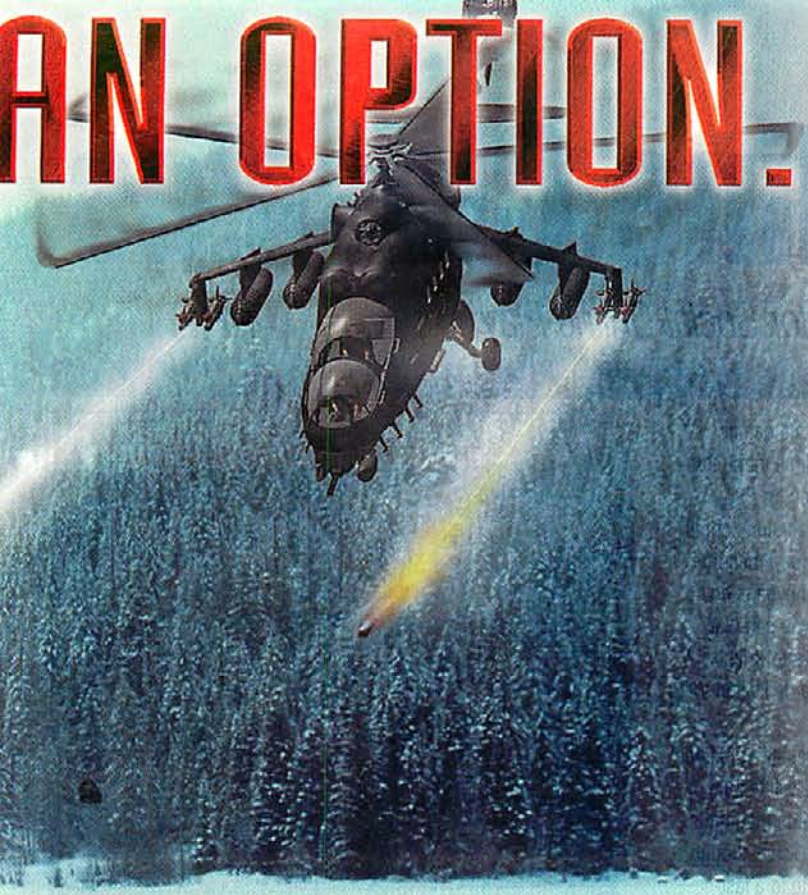


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The Online Classics

Classic Board Games Make for Social Online Play

BY TERRY COLEMAN

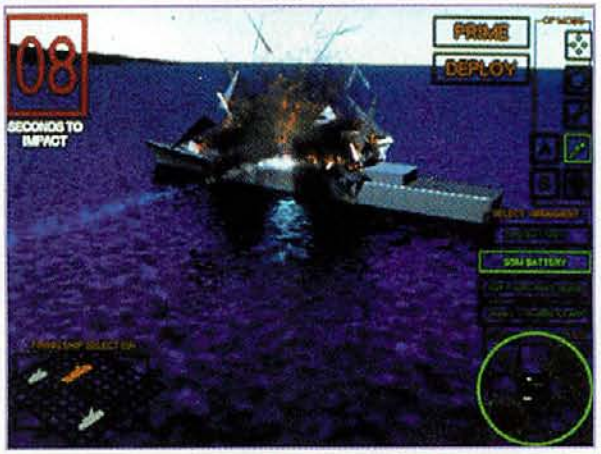
There really aren't any great puzzle games scheduled for the Internet anytime in the foreseeable future (we're still waiting for FULL-CONTACT VR TETRIS). Computer versions of old board-game classics, however, have become the Next Big Thing. Old Mr. Pennybags holds the Internet MONOPOLY, where you can play opponents the world 'round, converting German marks to British pounds, rubles to dollars, and so forth. There's even a dedicated Web site where you can meet fellow Boardwalk tycoons.

Far from resting on its laurels, Hasbro Interactive has an ambitious publishing schedule for the next year. Not every game will feature Internet play—you won't be able to engage in world-wide manhunts for Colonel Mustard and the candlestick in CLUE. BATTLESHIP, though, is a big surprise, transformed from a childhood favorite to a fast-paced real-time environment. Fleets maneuver over the ocean grid, rather than being frozen in place, and the tame "B-6, hit!" has been replaced by cruise missiles, aircraft, even stealthy submarines, all of which gleefully target enemy vessels. All this increased activity shouldn't cause much of a latency problem, given the small fleets engaged on the game "board." Best of all, the chat feature lets you hear "You sunk my battleship!" from opponents fighting in any of the vast oceans of the Net. And while this certainly won't challenge QUAKE from a technological standpoint, it looks to provide plenty of the same sort of mindless fun.



DUCK! Playing RISK! over the Net, up to six players per game can vie for control of the Napoleonic-styled elevated landscapes

Even if BATTLESHIP is a surprise hit, the most eagerly awaited classic game has to be RISK! The animation we've seen is, if anything, better than that MONOPOLY's, with sabre-rattling cavalry charges and booming cannon fire accompanying each attack. The territories, from Yakutsk to North Africa, are still a geography teacher's nightmare, but they make it to your monitor unchanged by the ravages of time. There are even cards to "flip" and dice to "roll," for the purist. Hasbro insists that their bevy of *Risk!* experts are putting the AI through its paces, hopefully avoiding the tepid opponents of computers past. Both the original French and modern American versions (with some extra rules from *Castle Risk!* thrown in) support modem and Internet play; but if world domination's your game, you'd better upgrade, because RISK! is Windows 95-only.



YOU SUNK MY BATTLESHIP! Those hankering for yesteryear can have their nostalgia *and* blow it up—in real time—playing BATTLESHIP on the Internet.

MAKE YOUR MOVE

Chess might be the easiest of all games to play over the Internet. After all, the game is turn based, with only one piece moving at a time. Mindscape is using this simplicity to good effect, by launching a coordinated gaming assault for CHESSMASTER 5000. In addition to the excellent Chess engine, wide array of computer opponents and thorough database that make CM 5000 great for solo play, Chessmaster Online offers one of the best gaming Web sites we've seen. The variety of chess clocks, including the new "Fischer clock," let you experiment with all manner of time controls for Internet play. The quality of competition (occasional visits by GMs), news and tournament listings, commentary by top players (including the reigning California champ, Curt Schilling), and gorgeous graphics make this a great environment in which to hang out and push pawns. (For more on CM 5000, see last month's review.)

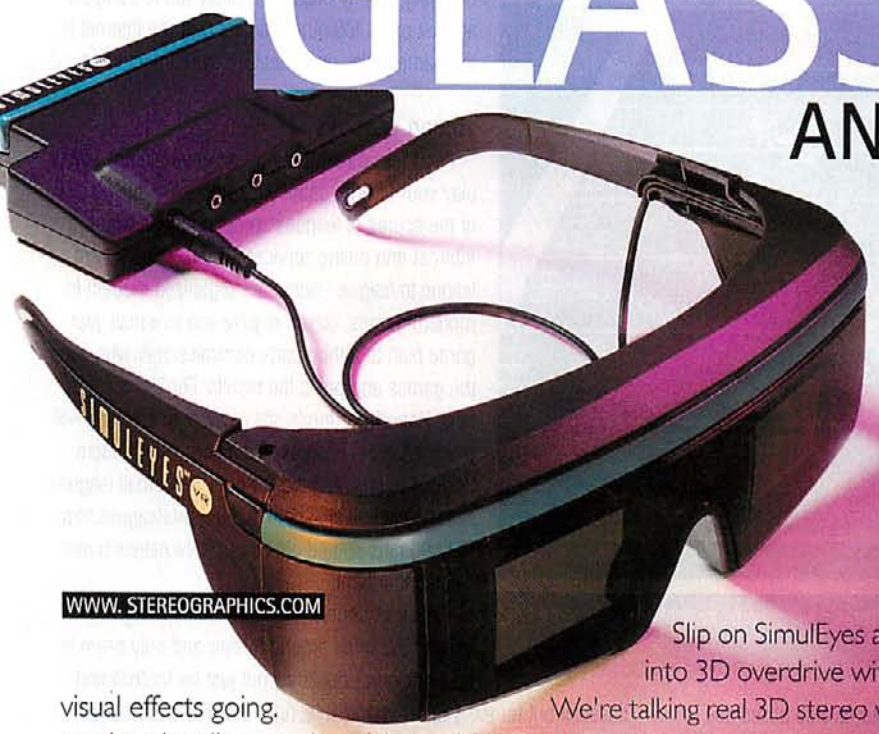


PAWN SHOP Chessmaster Online offers a lot more than the usual dry chess commentary, including news, visits from Grand Masters, and tournament listings.

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Top Of The First

Internet Sports Games Still Warming Up

BY JEFF GREEN

Major League Baseball plays an official game in Mexico...soccer matches draw sellout crowds in the U.S...John Tesh becomes an Olympics sportscaster: Yes, the sporting world's boundaries are constantly expanding. The Internet, too, is proving to be fertile new ground, as sports fans the world over are discovering the joys of international online gaming.

But before we gather for a group hug and a round of "We Are The World," we should note that, as of this date, your options are still very limited if you're hoping to get online with your favorite boxed title. Latency is still a big problem where action-oriented games are concerned, so if you're thinking about a five-on-five of NBA Live over the Internet—think again. We're not there yet.



REMOTE CONTROL Philips' TOTAL CONTROL FOOTBALL will soon be available on Engage for online pigskin play.

Sierra's FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL has actually been available for play on The Imagination Network for some time, where two players can square off with their favorite NFL teams (unfortunately, for now, still with the '94 edition).When INN reemerges later this year with its new look and name, CyberPark, it will also feature Sierra's FPS BASEBALL ONLINE, a new online version of the company's latest baseball sim. Due up by the end of September, the game will provide exhibition play, in manager-only mode for now.

The new Engage Games Online service is offering online play of Philips Media's upcoming TOTAL CONTROL FOOTBALL. The game, in beta at press time, will allow up to 30 teams to compete in two styles of online play: general management and on-field action. The game's virtual front office module is quite unlike any we've seen: You'll wear a variety of hats—GM, coach, scout, trainer—to try to drive your team towards a season of greatness. Or, if you just want to log on and kick some butt, the game will also support exhibition arcade play.

The only other boxed title we're aware of that will be available for online gaming soon is Sierra's TROPHY BASS II, the sequel to their surprisingly popular fishing simulation. Along with modem-to-modem and LAN play, Trophy Bass II will allow you to compete against up to 100 other gamers over the Internet in tournament play on 10 real-life tournament lakes.

20,000 LEAGUES

For a less direct (but no less entertaining) way to play your favorite game with others, try joining one of the scores of leagues sprouting up all over the Internet and online services. The rules vary from league to league—some are organized modem-to-modem games; others require you to e-mail your game plan to a third-party commissioner who sims the games and posts the results. For HARDBALL 5 fans, Robert Gardner's site (www.prairienet.org/~lilprog/hb5.html) is an excellent source of modem leagues to join. A good list of FPS Football leagues is at hector.unil.ch/~94418290/fbpro/leagues.html. NHL 96 fans should check out www.netreach.net/~jmk/main.html.

Finally, of course, there are fantasy leagues, which have been around forever and only seem to be gaining in popularity, not just for football and baseball but for every sport imaginable, right down to cricket and bowling. All the online services offer fantasy leagues; a particularly slick Web league hosted by ESPN's SportsZone is discussed in the Play-By-Email section of this feature.

For an interesting alternative to fantasy sports, check out Inventure's CYBERSKIPPER, an online game currently available directly on the official Web sites of the Atlanta Braves, Baltimore Orioles and Oakland A's. This game lets you compete with other fans on a daily basis in predicting which home players will perform best in hits, runs, RBIs, homers and stolen bases. Games are free, and prizes, such as tickets to games, are awarded.

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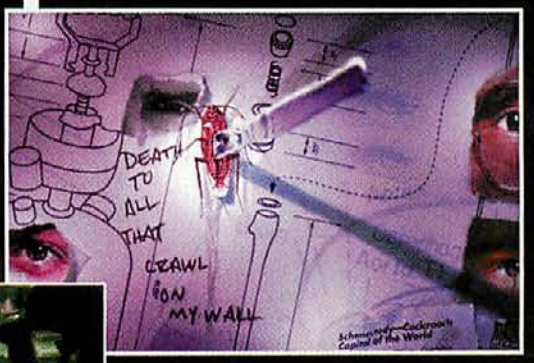
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Circle Reader Service #148

Aces Over The Internet

Cyberspace Provides A Deadly Battlefield for Sim Drivers

BY DENNY ATKIN

So you think you're an ace pilot, kid? Well, Junior, when you enlist in the ranks of online simulation squadrons, be prepared to be humbled. No computer-flown craft can match the cunning and unpredictability of even a mediocre human pilot. If you really want to test your mettle, log on to one of the services described below before you grab your joystick. If you can emerge unscathed from *these* battles, then you'll have bragging rights.



LIGHTNING STRIKE The P-38s in VR-1's AIR ATTACK should be significantly easier to fly than those in more sophisticated sims.

PROP WASH

While historical simulations, especially World War II sims, have been all but ignored by commercial sim producers in recent years, they're thriving online. Kesmai's classic AIR WARRIOR has faced a challenge from upstart ICI's WARBIRDS, and now CONFIRMED KILL from Eidos looks likely to give them both a run for your money.

These sims are all targeted at the fairly hard-core sim pilot. They model a wide variety of aircraft with a level of realism that will challenge even experienced sim pilots—the only WWII simulation you'll find on store shelves that can match the flight models is FIGHTER DUEL. Add a dedicated group of experienced fliers who form their own virtual squadrons and fly regularly, and you have a combat arena far more vicious and challenging than you'll find in any boxed simulation. WARBIRDS and AIR WARRIOR both feature simplified areas geared toward beginners, but they're rarely in use. The upcoming CONFIRMED KILL will have a unique method of matching up players; see sidebar for details.

AIR WARRIOR has evolved quite a bit over the years—the newest version playable on AOL and CompuServe runs under Windows—but it sports a graphic look that has changed little over the years. The action takes place in a window surrounded by a wraparound instrument panel, and while the aircraft interiors are superb, the relatively flat terrain still uses pyramids to represent mountains. This should change soon, with the release of Interactive Magic's boxed version of the game (playable both online and as a stand-alone sim), which will sport Kesmai's revamped graphic engine.

WARBIRDS is a more graphically impressive game that has evolved quite a bit since our initial look at it in these pages. The latest version features aircraft carriers and a number of new aircraft. ICI has been running periodic campaigns, complete with custom terrain. The recent Solomon Islands campaign will be followed by a Russian Front scenario, which should feature some new planes as well.

When there's no scenario in play, these sims are more or less organized anarchy. The game is always going on, and players can jump in, choose a country, and start going after enemy planes. But a better bet is to join one of the many squadrons players have formed, where you'll get the chance to fly with other players on organized missions.

If you're looking for a simpler flying experience, AIR ATTACK from VR-1 Entertainment promises a more arcadelike flying experience (the game has yet to go online, however). There's also a multiplayer version of the original RED BARON on INN (the service was recently purchased by AOL), but the communications delays make the game so jumpy that we can't recommend it.

BOX SEATS

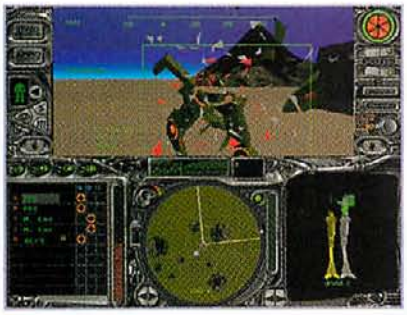
As the new Internet game services ramp up for launch, a number of sim producers have announced online-playable versions of their flight sims. FIGHTER DUEL will be playable on Engage, FALCON 4 on TEN, and RED BARON II on INN. How successful these will be probably will depend on how much effort is put into tailoring the games for online play and how well the games deal with the latency inherent in online play.

A good sign that the games *will* be playable is the success many sim players have had using Kali (see Loyd Case's column in the September issue for details on Kali) to play IPX network-capable games over the Internet. EF2000 is a current popular play on Kali servers, as is TOP GUN, and Jane's has recently patched ADVANCED TACTICAL FIGHTERS to make it more Kali compatible. The free NET DUEL patch for FIGHTER DUEL allows nine-player battles over Kali connections.

Any network-capable flight sim has the potential to work over Kali, but success actually depends on the size of the packets the sim sends to the game server and how much latency the sim can handle.

SPACED OUT

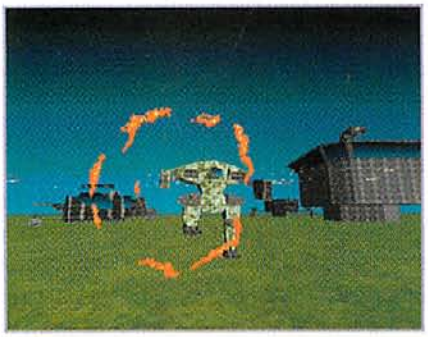
You're not just limited to aircraft sims when you log on—they do call it cyber*space*, you know. At press time, BATTLETECH: SOLARIS was available for play on GEnie, and for a free beta period on Kesmai's Web site; look for it to appear eventually on AOL. Set in the same BattleTech universe, this game mimics MECHWARRIOR 2 by dropping you into the cockpit of a giant robot. Although the game engine isn't as tuned as MW 2's, the variety of arenas and objectives available makes it worth checking out for action sim fans. Although SOLARIS concentrates almost completely on action, the upcoming MULTIPLAYER BATTLETECH: 3025 will also feature a role-playing shell that will allow you to join a classic BattleTech house and enter a strategic military campaign.



SHATTER DAY An unlucky Mech meets its doom in BATTLETECH: SOLARIS.

Of course, MECHWARRIOR 2 itself is playable online on Mplayer, and some gamers have successfully played over the Internet using Kali. Interplay's upcoming SHATTERED STEEL, another fast-action giant robot game, will be featured on Engage.

But the most exciting news is Activision's inclusion of in-the-box Internet play support—no commercial gaming service required—in the upcoming MECHWARRIOR 2: MERCENARIES. You'll be able to connect directly to a multiplayer game using TCP/IP, and a separate server program will be included as well. With no dollar-clock ticking in the background, MERCENARIES has the potential to rival QUAKE in time spent playing online.



MERC-Y KILLING MECHWARRIOR 2: MERCENARIES will support direct play over the Internet.

It's not all giant robots, either. ICI is following WARBIRDS with PLANETARY RAIDERS, which will feature both space combat and trade. Kesmai is taking Interactive Magic's underrated STAR RANGERS online, where the sim should truly shine. And while we haven't ferreted out any concrete plans yet, you know it's just a matter of time before WING COMMANDER ONLINE is launched.

LOGGING TIME

Of course, there's much more for the sim fan to play online. Sierra will soon launch NASCAR RACING LEAGUE, based on NASCAR RACING 2. Look for many new sim releases to have online support from the start (designers from groups like Jane's Combat Simulations keep getting silly, knowing grins on their faces when we ask about online play in future products). As more sim players are exposed to online, multiplayer play, who knows–we may eventually describe computer-flown AI vehicles as "those easy bogies we used to practice on."

Confirmed Kill Flies Again

When Domark's agreement with ICI to produce CONFIRMED KILL (CK) fell apart and the game went on to become WARBIRDS, the company (now renamed Eidos) didn't throw in the towel. Instead they went back to the drawing board to create their own version of CK.

Like its competitors, the game will feature a host of ultrarealistic WWII aircraft, including the P-51D, P-47D-40, P-38J-25, Spitfire Mk. V, Il-10, F4F-3, Ju-87G-2, and others. Look for next-generation graphics and possibly real-time voice support.

CK has the potential to really shine with its innovative approach to the combat arena. Instead of portraying a single, constant battlefield where all the players fly, CK drops you into a lobby where players will be sortable by name, squadron, skill level, connection speed, call sign, and rating. There you'll see a list of missions you can fly. Players can create missions by adjusting a wide variety of settings, including flight model (easy, intermediate and realistic), damage model, gunnery, fuel consumption, weapons loads, starting location and winning conditions.

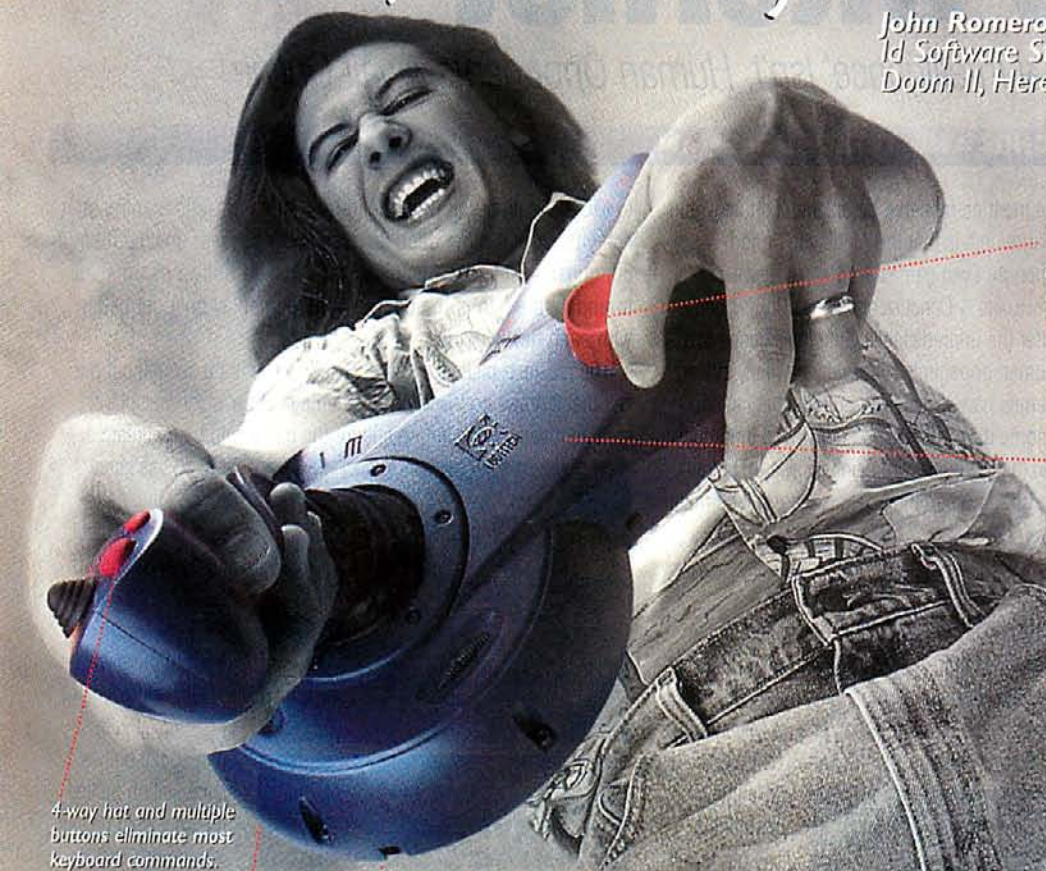


With this ability to customize mission complexity, CK should be a more friendly environment for beginners. In addition, scoring will prioritize sportsmanlike play, so with luck you'll see fewer jerks trying for dive-and-run kills. You'll also be rewarded for sticking by your wingman in a fight.

CK will premier on TEN this fall. For more information, check out www.domark.com.

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Marching Over The Internet

When 'Artificial Intelligence' Isn't, Human Opponents Await Online

BY ELLIOTT CHIN AND TERRY COLEMAN

The most oft-repeated complaint of strategy and wargamers is that the AI just isn't good enough. Even games like PANZER GENERAL, COMMAND & CONQUER and CLOSE COMBAT can't offer the unpredictability and intelligence of a human opponent. That's why so many strategy games have multiplayer options that include Internet play. Of course, some developers aren't convinced that multiplayer gaming has arrived (as CIV II fans are painfully aware), but as long as the AI fails to live up to human intelligence, there will be much better opponents online.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

The long-awaited MASTER OF ORION 2 (MOO2) is scheduled for release this holiday season. This follow-up to MicroProse's MASTER OF ORION is an expansive space-exploration game that can only be described as "CIVILIZATION in space." Unlike the original, it will support up to eight players in multiplayer matches, with options for quick-start or lengthy campaigns. The game will be playable online only through TEN.



MOO2 Multiplayer options will send this game from merely great to stellar.

Another strategy game in space is Accolade's DEADLOCK, which puts you in command of one of six alien races vying for control of a single planet's resources. Previewed in our May issue, DEADLOCK has all the makings of an engrossing sci-fi world-building game of conquest and diplomacy. You'll be able to play it over TEN and Mplayer.

Another strategy game in space can't be found in store shelves. You'll have to point your Web browser to www.webmap.com/stars to play STARS!, a turn-based space strategy game by Star Crossed Software. This title has a similar theme to MOO2, in that you must build up a huge galactic empire, interact with several other alien species and wage war against them in conquest or defense. Because Star Crossed Software continues to update the game, the controls and gameplay only get better with each new version.

The real-time battle for space, STARCRAFT, is not a sequel, but the fact that it draws on WARCRAFT II's heritage of excellent multiplayer gaming means many are waiting for the game with bated breath.



STARCRAFT This isn't a copy of WARCRAFT II in space, but a richer game, with three races, distinct abilities and refined gameplay.

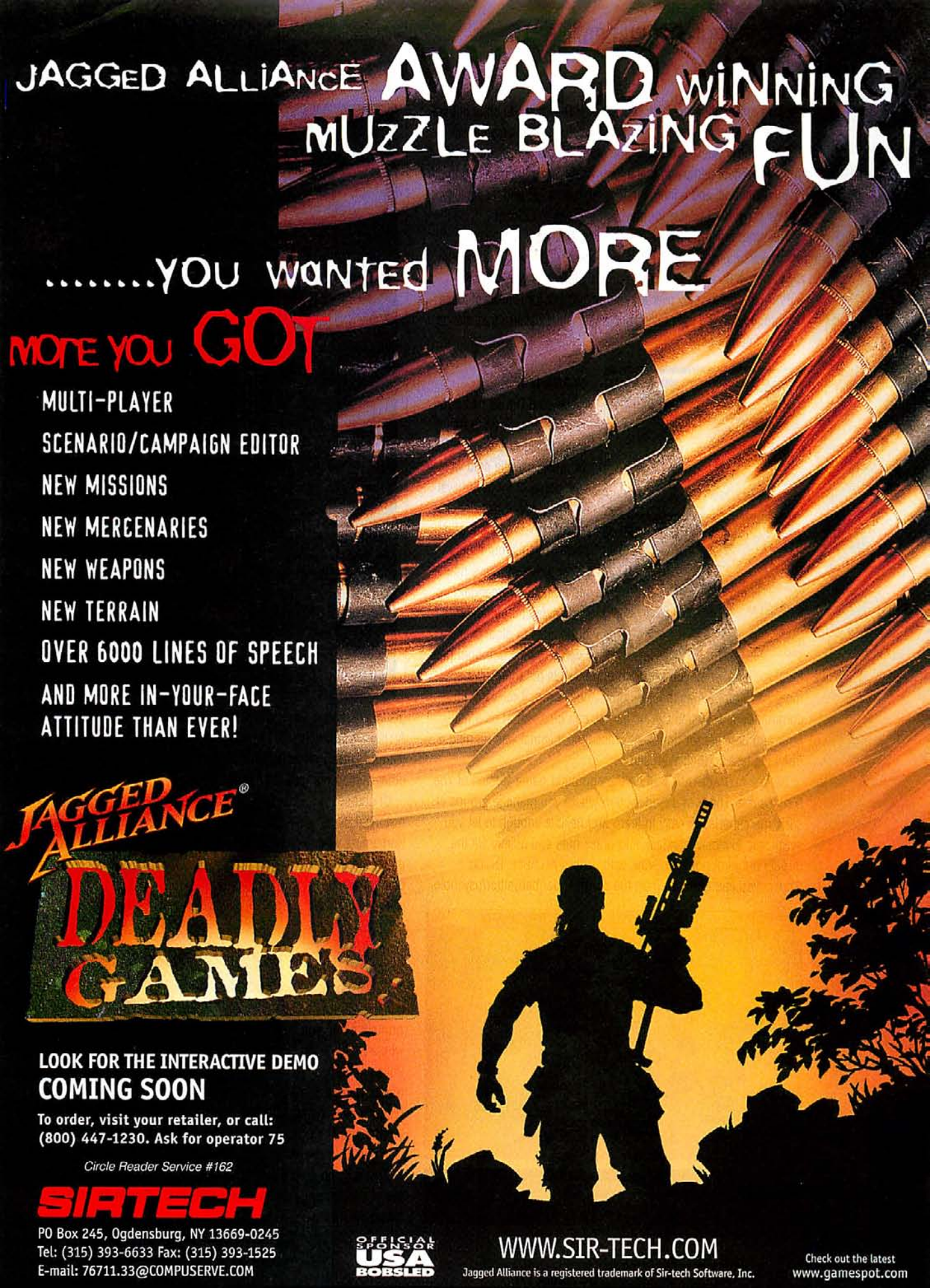
Blizzard has since dropped the entire "Orcs in space" feel and gone for a more 3D, high-tech look. The game is still real-time, but there will be a major improvement in gameplay, with open space battles, space station battles and inner ship battles.

There will also be three distinct races to play with different abilities and weaknesses. The multiplayer features of WARCRAFT II, such as the spawning technology, large maps and up-to-eight-person play, will still be present. But even better, STARCRAFT will be playable online over Blizzard's new free online gaming service, battle.net. As described in last month's Network Gaming feature, it will allow anyone with an ISP and the game to connect to battle.net for real-time wargaming, at no additional charge beyond your ISP fees. STARCRAFT should be available by Christmas, and battle.net will be up in late September when Blizzard's RPG DIABLO ships.

REAL-TIME WARS

Speaking of Blizzard, fans of WARCRAFT II will finally be able to play this incredible real-time game over the Internet, without the use of Kali. Interplay has signed an agreement with Blizzard for the exclusive right to offer WARCRAFT II for play over their new online gaming service, Engage. DWANGO, though, at least until some legal action is taken by Engage, is also offering WARCRAFT II for play with its service.

WARCRAFT II's predecessor, WARCRAFT: ORCS VS HUMANS, will also be


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playable online, through TEN, Mplayer and DWANGO. Another entrant into the real-time fray is SSI's WarWind, which should arrive in stores in the next few weeks. This real-time game boasts four unique races, a more consistent campaign that allows you to bring troops along to different scenarios, and a theme that combines magic and technology. WarWind will be available for play over Mplayer in October.

The other real-time player, is of course, Command & Conquer, which will be playable over Mplayer. However, Command & Conquer for Windows 95 and Red Alert, both due later this year, will offer TCP/IP support for play over the Internet. Watch for reviews of these two products in the upcoming months for more detailed information on their Internet play.



CAPTAINS OUTRAGEOUS With Harpoon Online becoming available on AOL and CompuServe, the larger player pool has made battles with multiple commanders on each side more probable.

WARGAMES

Harpoon Online has also come of age. Soon to be available on AOL and CompuServe, the cold war-era game of modern naval tactical combat has gotten better. Harpoon was a great solitaire game, but it gets better when you have multiple human commanders on each side and authentic opponents to gloat over. Even a routine sub hunt gets more exciting when you know an opponent is out there. Two or more can compete as theater commanders and, if relevant, force commanders. Harpoon Online games can be as short as a half-hour and can last for hours. At press time, Kesmai was running a free beta test on their Web site.

Jagged Alliance may well be the computer game version of *The Dirty Dozen*. The turn-based system where you manage groups of surly mercenaries is easy to learn and flexible enough to let you set plastic explosives, sneak into grass huts and quietly slit the throats of the opposition. Now, with Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games, you can be more than the commander/babysitter/psychologist/confessor of the original. You can design your own Jagged Alliance scenarios with the editor and, best of all, assemble a team of crack mercernary malcontents to go after teams led by other human commanders on TEN.



DEADLY GAMES Jagged Alliance's new editor and human-to-human play more than offset the older VGA graphics.

Of course, for historical wargamers who prefer the one-on-one approach to wargaming, don't forget MPG-Net's Operation Market-Garden. Based on the GDW board game covering the Arnhem campaign, where British and Polish airborne troops were unable to secure the bridges over the Rhine, OMG has recently been upgraded to feature music and sound effects. Wargamers should log on to MPGN on Monday nights when OMG vets gather to challenge each other and tell war stories.



RHINE WHINE The Allies run into stiff resistance early during Operation Market Garden on MPG-Net.

This is by no means a complete list, but it is a first look at the number of stellarstrategy and wargame titles that will soon be, or are now, hitting the Internet.

Panzer Online

Panzer Online offers several smaller scenarios suitable for play during a lunch hour, such as Poland. But even the larger PG scenarios are manageable, due to parameters you define. For example, instead of waiting for your opponent to take his entire turn, you can move in alternating impulses: I move three German units, you move five Russians, etc. This results in some interesting strategic decisions. Do I send out tactical air to soften up defenses, knowing that my opponent might send fighters to intercept? Or do I throw my superior armor into the breach, knowing that my infantry won't follow until the enemy has had a chance to respond?



These questions are rendered more acute by an unusual factor for a turn-based game: time pressure. The version of PG Online that we saw was experimenting with user-defined time limits. You could give your opponent more time (say 5 minutes an impulse) to move those massive Russian armies, or put pressure on a veteran German player, giving him only 2 minutes. It's a lot like speed chess with WWII combined arms. When you throw in the extra scenarios designed specifically for two-player play, PG Online looks like a sure winner for TEN.

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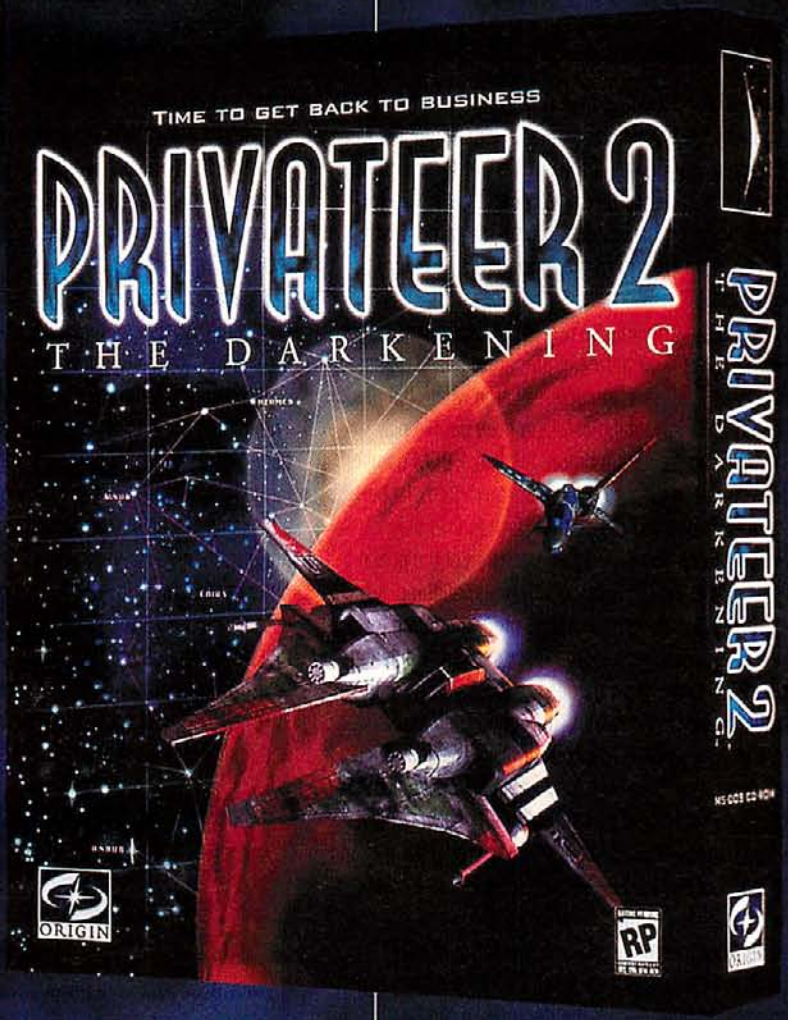
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Time Flies When You're On The Net

Have Your Time and Game, Too, With Play By E-Mail

BY JOHNNY L. WILSON

It's been around since e-mail first appeared. It's usually text-based. It's always turn-based. Sometimes it's free. Sometimes you pay by the turn. It's not for everybody, but it's an answer for those who can't be online for hours on end and a perfect answer for gamers who have very little time to game, period. It's Play By Electronic Mail (PBEM).

At its simplest, PBEM can merely be two players swapping saved game files for PANZER GENERAL or a host of other turn-based games. At its most complex, PBEM can be a multiplayer game where hundreds of people play. It offers the advantage of letting busy people play games that would normally require a group. Instead, PBEM gamers shift time and play games lasting months that would normally be played in one evening or one day of real-time, face-to-face play.

Multiplayer Play By Electronic Mail is an extension of the postal gaming hobby. Multiplayer PBEM is any game where all the players submit their move(s) by e-mail, form or online program during an established period of time and wait for the response of the batch-processed move. PBEM began with games like Chess on mainframes and migrated to the online services with Chess and Diplomacy.

Today, there are all kinds of PBEM games available online with a variety of pricing structures. Some are free; some are advertiser supported; some require a set fee per turn (these are usually online versions of long-lasting play-by-mail games); some charge a flat fee; and some charge by the hour. This article will list some of the multiplayer PBEM games with which we're most impressed.

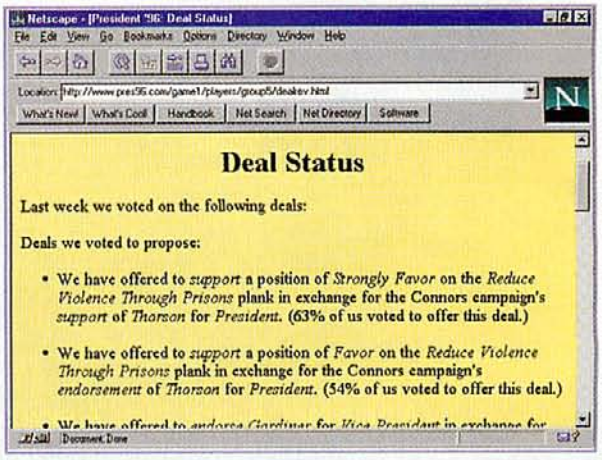
HUNDRED YEARS WAR (currently available on AOL): Master wargame designer Jim Dunnigan has developed an amazing experience where hundreds of players assume the roles of medieval nobles and vie for control of fiefs in France and England. To some, Hundred Years War is a role-playing game with player interaction being the key. To others, HYW is pure diplomacy—the art of the deal. To others, it is a turn-based wargame with economic elements. HYW is all of these and more.

Nobles use a simple menu-based form to input their economic decisions for each fief, military maneuvers and role-playing decisions (such as taking one's wife or mistress abed, arranging marriages, or gambling to increase one's funds), as well as correspond with the hundreds of nobles represented in each game. The next day, results are printed in the chronicles of the game or in the individual fief and noble summaries.

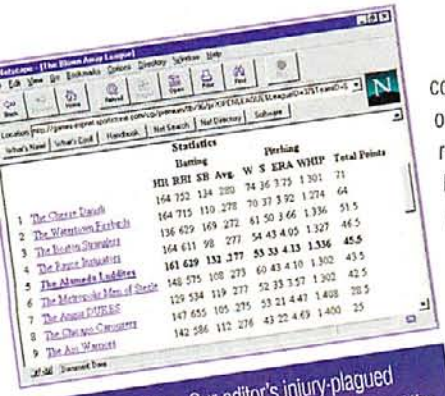
Although the results of various games can vary far from the results of history, HYW does a wonderful job of demonstrating the chaos and intrigue of medieval politics. Every student of history should try it as an educational experience, but wargamers simply shouldn't miss it. (AOL pricing applies.)

PRESIDENT '96 (available on AOL and the World Wide Web): At press time, Crossover Technologies' PRESIDENT '96 game was just moving into the convention season where daily moves are weighted over the convention proxy moves of sending all your moves at once. Throughout the primary season, weekly moves were sufficient. In this game, thousands of "campaign managers" fill out weekly (now, daily) forms to advise their candidates (fictional characters that may reflect amalgams of well-known personalities in each party) on responding or not responding to the issues of the day or to various deals offered by other candidates. Moves are handled via form-based input, so the interface is dead simple. The issues are as complex as those in the real world, though, so don't underestimate the challenge of the game.

Crossover doesn't like being referred to as a PBEM game because PRESIDENT '96 offers multimedia speeches by the candidates in video and audio, faux Web pages for each candidate, and online chat/



PREZ CONFERENCE From the earliest primaries through the virtual smoke-filled back rooms of the conventions to election night itself, President '96 offers an amazingly detailed simulated campaign.



J.L. ON THE D.L. Our editor's injury-plagued Alameda Luddites were mired in the middle of the pack throughout the Fantasy Baseball season on ESPN's SportsZone.

convention events live on AOL. Even as the real election nears, PRESIDENT '96 is worth checking out. The faux candidates are credible, the situations/world events fascinating, and the campaign materials are entertaining. (advertiser-supported on the Web, AOL pricing applies on AOL)

FANTASY BASEBALL/FOOTBALL: Although fantasy sports leagues have long been a feature of online networks, ESPN's SportsZone site offers the easiest means of drafting (using a form-based draft or attending a live online draft) players, getting up-to-date information, setting up leagues, making trades and handling waiver selections. You can make roster moves and waiver selections whenever you want with ESPN's system.

At press time, the earliest Fantasy Football drafts are just taking place, but they should still be going on when you get this issue. ($29.95 per season or $19.95 to gamers who subscribe to ESPN's SportsZone at $39.95 per year)

AGE OF DISCOVERY: These are classic PBEM games with weekly turns. GLOBAL DIPLOMACY and AGE OF DISCOVERY are expansions of the Diplomacy idea with the former representing roughly the pre-WWI era and the latter a 19th century colonial era in a fictitious world. A similar game, featuring diplomacy and economic struggle on pre-WWII-era planet (World At War) is currently under playtest. IMPERIUM is a game of galactic conquest and diplomacy. These games are truly international in scope. Doug Greening runs circa 20 PBEM games at a time and they are currently free of charge. Since there are limited slots available, new gamers are urged to take on a "dropped position" in order to learn the mechanics and all gamers are warned that you can lose your position by missing more than one turn in a given game. (free)

Hundreds More: Of course, these are just a few samples of what is available online. For additional listings, please check out Yahoo's PBEM listing (www.yahoo.com/Recreation/Games/Internet_Games/Play_By_E_Mail/) or contact the dedicated PBM and PBEM experts at *Paper Mayhem*, the bimonthly magazine published in the U.S. (72537.3322@compuserve.com), or Flagship, the U.K. and U.S. magazine for the hobby (www.pbm.com/flagship/) (72537.3322@compuserve.com). In addition, you can always check out the listing of free e-mail games on the Web (www.pbm.com/~lindahl/pbm_list/free.html).



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Circle Reader Service #280

Making The Connection

A Quick-Start Guide To Getting On The Net

BY DENNY ATKIN

So you're ready to join the online gaming frenzy, but you're not sure where to start. Here's our look at the applications you'll need to get rolling, and to get the most out of the Net.

First you'll need to select an Internet provider. Although AOL and CompuServe offer TCP/IP capabilities, AOL's implementation is currently nonstandard, and CompuServe is too slow for gaming. We recommend you select an Internet-only provider. There are national providers, such as The Concentric Network, GNN, and SpryNet, as well as hundreds of local net providers. Look for one that offers a TCP/IP connection to the Net using the PPP protocol and supports the Windows 95 dial-up software.



NEWS CENTRAL With a little setup, AGENT can automatically filter out the flamers while making sure to grab messages from knowledgeable posters.

Next you'll need Winsock TCP/IP software. This is the networking software that connects you to the Internet. We strongly recommend using the TCP/IP software included with Windows 95, as most of the online gaming services are requiring Win 95. The Win 95 Plus! add-on includes an Internet setup wizard that makes configuring this much easier. See Loyd Case's column in this issue for a look at configuring Win 95's dial-up networking.

WEB SLINGING

Once you're connected, you'll need a Web browser; most of the Internet gaming services use a Web browser to launch their games. The choice boils down to Netscape Navigator versus Microsoft's Internet Explorer.

They're both good products, but for now we'll have to give the nod to Navigator. The program remains on the leading edge of supporting new Web media, and the wide variety of plug-in modules available make it easy to add the ability to play live video and audio, view 3D VRML files, display Acrobat documents, and so on.

If you want to create your own Web pages, we give the nod to Microsoft's FrontPage 1.1. It's easy to use, supports a wide variety of HTML features, and is the first editor we've used that really does let you create sophisticated pages with nearly no knowledge of HTML.

TOOL CHEST

While Web browsers can transfer files using FTP (File Transfer Protocol), you'll want a dedicated FTP tool to allow you to easily transfer multiple files. WS-FTP and CuteFTP are both top notch, but the former is available in a freeware version, so it gets the value vote.

You'll want a better news reader program than the one included with your Web browser. Forte's Agent makes newsreading a pleasure. You can read and respond to messages offline, and automatically decode binary files. But by far our favorite feature is the watch/kill list, which lets you configure Agent to automatically grab messages covering your favorite game or from "posters" you respect, and to similarly ignore flame wars and messages posted by known annoying people. Agent costs $29, but a more basic freeware trial version is available as well.

Finally, for e-mail, check out Pegasus Mail. Along with the ability to read and respond offline, Pegasus features mail filtering, which can automatically categorize e-mail and place it in folders as it comes in. It's a must-have if you join any mailing lists.

Other accessories you should check out include RealAudio for listening to Net broadcasts, WS-Finger for getting information on Net users, Visual IRC for real-time chatting, and LView Pro for viewing and printing graphics files.

FINDING IT ON THE NET

To find these Internet applications, you need browse no further than Stroud's Consummate Winsock Apps list (**www.stroud.com** and **www.cwsapps.com**). These sites list and review nearly every Windows Internet program available, and include direct links for downloading the applications.

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Dialing... Connecting... Gaming!

BY DAVE SALVATOR

CGW Explains The Latest Modem Technology And Puts Five Fast Modems To The Gaming Test

How many of these communication terms do you understand?

- ☐ *DSVD*
- ☐ *ADSL*
- ☐ *Latency*
- ☐ *PnP*
- ☐ *T1*
- ☐ *ISDN*
- ☐ *DirectPlay*

And how will knowing about them help you play/shoot/conquer/kill faster?





Strings Attached

If you've done any modem-based gaming, you're no doubt familiar with the dreaded initialization strings that set modems' various feature switches on and off. Though arcane at first, once you get the hang of them, they're not so horrendous. There's a fairly standard lexicon of AT commands among modems; however, vendors often have their own as well. Check your documentation to see how to implement these features. We'd like to tell you there's a silver-bullet init string that will work across the board, but there isn't. More often than not, it comes down to trial and error from game to game and modem to modem.

Many titles' readme files include modem string settings for different modems, but here are a few string settings that usually work well with most games:

String	What It Does
AT Z	Resets modem to the configuration stored in nonvolatile memory and clears any other settings.
AT &F	Most basic setting; puts modem in "autoreliable" mode, where it will negotiate error correction and compression for best connection.
AT &C1 &D2	Sets carrier detect the way many games expect it.

This could be the year online, real-time gaming really takes off, with a host of services all vying to become your online playground. If you want to play it on the line, a modem is your ticket to the fun zone. Modems have greatly improved over the last few years, with gains not only in speed but in capabilities like fax and simultaneous voice and data.

But modems are notorious for causing more than their share of configuration headaches. Because of rapidly changing standards, modems have been dogged by compatibility problems that sometimes keep them from communicating at their top speeds. Adding to the confusion, modem settings—what's enabled and disabled—vary from game to game. So one game's smooth settings may make another crash and burn.

The key to making online gaming happen is knowing the three things gamers need most out of a modem: low latency, speed and compatibility.

Latency is the amount of time required to transmit data from your rig to another to keep a multiplayer game going. Low latency is especially crucial in action titles, where the lag time can make or break the overall experience. Modem speeds have been on the rise, with the data rates making their way toward 28.8 kilobits per second (Kbps) and newer modems going to 33.6 Kbps. The fatter pipe means more data across the wire, more opponents, more mayhem, more...You get the idea.

In general, modems communicate with one another with varied success, with throughput ranging from pretty speedy to butt-slow. In particular, early on different vendors' modems manufactured to the V.34 specification had difficulty connecting to one another in higher speed modes; sometimes they couldn't establish a connection at all. Many of the incompatibilities have since been remedied, and most modems from different vendors will connect to one another. The hit rate on establishing higher-speed connections is also on the upswing. But to better understand the issues involved, it's helpful to consider the whole "network" involved in making modem connections happen.

CALL ROTO-ROOTER

In fairness, the modem isn't always the culprit; phone lines often dictate how fast two modems are going to communicate. Phone lines were originally designed to carry voice signals, not data generated by modems, and line "impairments"—caused by the distance the signal travels and by certain pieces of routing equipment that phone companies use—often keep modems from achieving top speeds. Line quality for any given call can vary greatly, which partly explains why you'll get 21.6 Kbps on an Internet service provider (ISP) connection one day and 24.4 Kbps the next.

The latest International Telecommunications Union (ITU) specification, which new modems use, is called V.34. It calls for throughput of 28.8 Kbps. ITU recently agreed upon an extension of V.34 that calls for boosting throughput to 33.6 Kbps. For gamers, the fatter pipe may mean more opponents, sometimes as many as 16, which can make for quite a ruckus.

But while modem speeds have been steadily increasing, one issue has by and large been ignored: latency. Experienced online gamers are already painfully familiar with the problem, where a game's rate of play is consistently poky, or worse still, varies wildly. Unfortunately, my esteemed profession is partly to blame for this predicament. Because the focus of modem reviews in computer magazines has concentrated on speed, speed, and more speed, that's where modem vendors have concentrated their efforts, instead of trying to minimize latency. Modems use different buffering schemes to increase overall throughput, but any memory buffer is like another train stop on your homeward commute, so the extra speed comes at the cost of added latency.

In Web surfing and other online activities, where most of the traffic is flowing one way—to you—latency isn't really noticeable. But with highly interactive, twitch-and-splatter titles like QUAKE, or real-time strategy titles like WARCRAFT II, where data needs to be passed rapidly back and forth between two or more rigs, latency can really rain on your parade. What's more, game data usually has to make four modem passes—out your modem, through your ISP's modem, through another ISP's modem, and into the other guy's modem—to reach a fellow gamer, compounding the latency problem

Recent research at ZD Labs showed that nearly all modems have similar latency times, ranging anywhere from about 80 to 100 milliseconds with good line conditions. As a rule, as line condition goes south, latency increases. Latency problems are further exacerbated by the Internet, which is no speed demon. If you've ever used the Ping command to see if another computer is on the Net, you've probably seen it returns a round-trip time of milliseconds—typically in the

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200–300 millisecond range. So Internet gaming can sometimes be subject to almost a half-second of latency, which normally isn't much time but in an action game can be an eternity.

Some online gaming services have been crafting workarounds to bring latency down, but the jury is still out as to how effective these tricks will be. Emerging technologies like Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL), Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) and cable modems may begin to address the problem (see sidebar), but they're still a ways from widespread implementation. In the short term, we'll be dealing with at least some latency.

So how do you squeeze the most performance out of the current crop of modems? We tested five modems to see how they fared for gaming. Three of these modems also have Digital Simultaneous Voice and Data (DSVD) technology implemented, which lets you make a data connection with another PC and talk to the gamer at the other end of the line. We trekked down to ZD Labs and used their TAS telephone network emulator to evaluate the units. The TAS simulates typical line conditions found on the Plain Old Telephone System (POTS) that most of us use to get online. TAS allowed us to have the same testing environment, or line condition, for all modems evaluated.

Unfortunately at press time, none of the Windows 95 titles we had in house that used DirectPlay—the modem/networking component of Microsoft's DirectX application programming interface (API) family—were solid enough to use as testing tools. But as those titles begin to ship, we'll be looking at their head-to-head modem play and how well they do when connecting to online gaming services.

So without further ado, let's have at it.

YOU WANNA TAKE THIS OUTSIDE?

The first painful lesson we learned here was this: *Get a Plug-and-Play external modem!* If you have to go with an internal model, make sure it's Plug-and-Play (PnP). Non-PnP internal modems are fraught with configuration problems under Windows 95, and will probably conflict with your rig's existing COM ports. Unless you really enjoy whiling away the hours trying to solve seemingly paradoxical I/O conflicts, save yourself the trouble and go with an external modem.

The external PnP units we evaluated installed in less than 5 minutes, and were pretty much ready to rock in both DOS and Windows 95. In both our test systems, we ran into numerous conflicts with non-PnP internal modems trying to hook to COM ports and having to fight Windows 95 to access them. Interestingly, Hayes's PnP Accura internal modem came up without a glitch, as did Creative's external Modem Blaster 28, also a PnP unit.



CREATIVE LABS MODEM BLASTER 28.8

Creative's Modem Blaster (is there anything these guys won't blast?) had one of the easiest installations. Both internal and external versions are PnP, but only the external version came up in both Windows 95 and DOS sans difficulties. The internal version relies on Creative's PnP utility to get its I/O resource settings in MS-DOS mode, and this utility wouldn't assign the same I/O settings we used successfully in Windows 95. In addition, the DOS-based Diagnose utility wouldn't allow us to map the same I/O resources used in

ADSL: The Next Big Thing?

Though latency tends to be the primary culprit in sluggish modem gameplay, a fatter pipe wouldn't hurt either. A recent quote from id programming guru John Carmack is telling. Commenting on QUAKE's somewhat sluggish modem play, he said, "I've been playing it over my T1 connection, and the gameplay seems fine." A T1 connection is what most medium-sized corporations use to connect their entire outfit to the Internet. T1 offers 1.54 megabits per second (Mbps) of bandwidth, over 50 times faster than current modems, but it's prohibitively expensive for most individual users (Ferrari drivers excepted). Faster, lower-latency communications methods are needed to get the online gaming train really rolling.

Predictions about the next dominant communications pipe are best left to genies and mages. Here are a few technologies that are brewing and may make their way into your home over the next few years.

Current modem technologies connect to one another at a top rate of 33.6 Kbps. Using clever compression tricks, modems can sometimes deliver an effective transfer rate of 115.2 Kbps. But games often want compression disabled for their connections, since this feature tends to add overhead (more latency). There's been quite a buzz surrounding technologies like Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), which can deliver a 128-Kbps pipe, and cable modems, which may one day be widely available to deliver even fatter pipes. ISDN's other big appeal for gamers is that its latency is considerably less—reportedly about half—that of conventional modems.

Both technologies face their own hurdles, though. There's still some specification squabbling over how ISDN achieves its 128-Kbps pipe. And as for cable modems, which may be able to deliver a 10-Mbps plus pipe (burn, baby burn!), cable companies will first need to retrofit some of their infrastructure before these modems can become widely available.

Since phone companies don't want to be left in the dust, they are developing a new specification of their own. Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) will run over standard phone lines, and may deliver as much as 6 Mbps downstream (into your home), and 64 Kbps upstream. Latency for ADSL is supposed to be comparable to that of ISDN, and will be good news for gamers if it achieves widespread implementation. ADSL may even have a fighting chance, since it requires very little additional equipment and phone companies don't need to do major plumbing upgrades to make it happen. We'll be following all these technologies as the online gaming world continues to blossom, and we'll keep you apprised. Stay tuned.

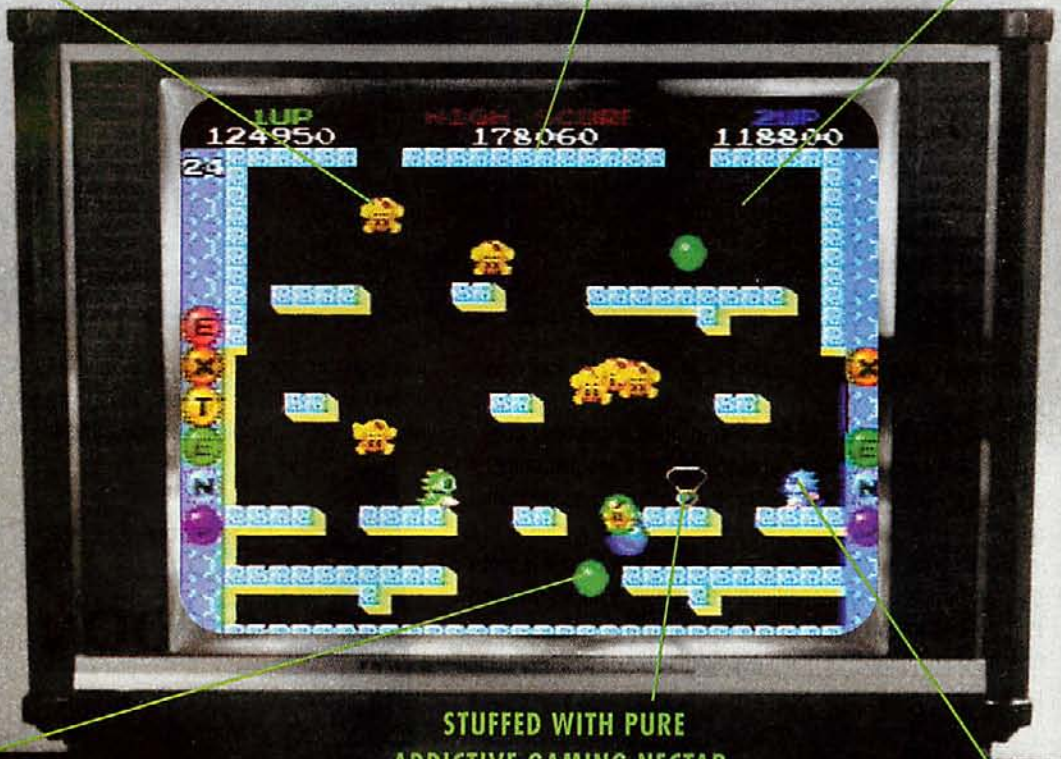
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DSVD Modems: A Big Happy Dysfunctional Family?

A number of modem vendors have recently brought out Digital Simultaneous Voice and Data (DSVD) modems, which let you talk to a fellow gamer. At first glance, it's a pretty cool technology. Most implementations take a 28.8-Kbps connection and divide it up, giving the voice channel about 9.6 Kbps and data transmission the remaining 19.2 Kbps. Voice quality is on a par with what you'd hear on a normal phone, and hands-free headsets are widely available, letting you focus your attention where it belongs.

But like any technology, DSVD has its limitations. Most notably, DSVD is a point-to-point technology, meaning it works fine for two people connecting directly, but online game services aren't implementing DSVD features; they are opting instead for their own voice-chat functionality. So once you're in a chat room or into a game with more than two players, DSVD can no longer be used. DSVD has also suffered from compatibility woes, with different vendors offering slightly varied versions of DSVD modems, which may or may not talk to one another in DSVD mode.

To squeeze your voice data through a 9.6-Kbps pipe, DSVD modems use a speech coder/decoder, or *codec*, to compress and decompress your voice transmission. Vendors have pretty much settled on two different codecs for DSVD: one called TrueSpeech, and another called DigiTalk. DSVD modems from different vendors that use the same speech codec can usually connect in DSVD mode; two modems that use different speech codecs, cannot.

Is DSVD a good option for gamers? If you're headed online for multiplayer adventures, DSVD doesn't bring much to the party. But if you do a lot of head-to-head gaming against people with compatible DSVD modems, this technology lets you squeeze the frag and the taunt into one phone line instead of two.

Windows 95, citing a resource conflict (probably with itself—go figure).

Under DOS, the external version performed respectably, connecting with several different vendors' modems and delivering relatively smooth overall performance, though QUAKE was somewhat poky.

Given a choice, the external version of Modem Blaster is probably your best bet. The internal came up fine in Windows 95 using PnP, but had trouble under DOS. Overall gaming performance was fine, making the external unit a good candidate, especially for the price.

HAYES ACCURA 28.8 DSVD

Hayes has been in the modem game for many moons, and Hayes compatibility is something of an industry standard. Their Accura 28.8 DSVD is positioned as "The Total Gaming Solution," and it does cover many of the bases. Their software bundle includes starter kits for several ISPs and online services, fax and communications front-ends, as well as a voice mail application that turns your PC into an answering machine. Most notable for gamers though, is a bundled copy of Papyrus's NASCAR RACING.

Windows 95 installation was absolutely painless. After we put in the PnP card, Windows 95 detected the Accura on startup. We fed it a driver disk, and Windows 95 installation was a done deal. Because PnP devices can sometimes be allocated I/O resources that DOS applications can't use, Hayes includes a DOS program called COMSET16, which sets I/O resources when you reboot into DOS. Overall, Hayes had the easiest installation of just about all modems reviewed here.



Gameplay over the Accura was good for the most part. DOOM SE and NASCAR played smoothly, while QUAKE, admittedly not a very modem-friendly game, was somewhat sluggish for the client-side player (the one who dialed in to join).



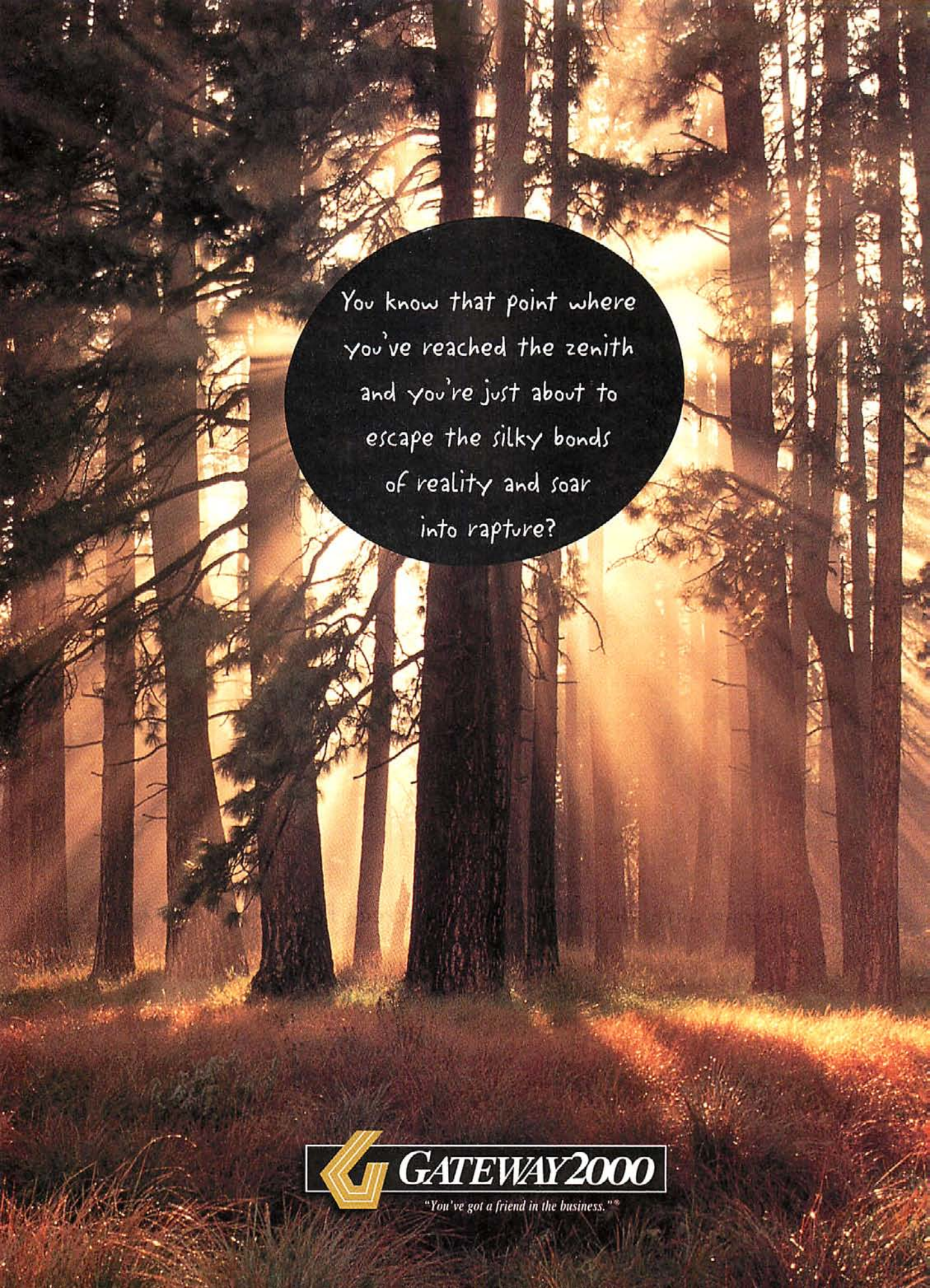
In DSVD mode, you can use a hands-free headset, an analog phone or speaker phone mode.

EIGER LABS HEADON 28.8 DSVD

The 28.8 DSVD is Eiger's second digital signal processor (DSP)-based HeadOn offering, following the 14.4-Kbps version that shipped about a year ago. Our initial impression of the 14.4-Kbps model was that it had some good ideas but also some rough edges. The non-PnP 28.8-Kbps version hasn't refined these rough edges, which include a borderline-sadistic installation routine and a proprietary DOS utility designed to connect you to other gamers—in DSVD mode if they're also using a HeadOn.

Curiously, the HeadOn is the only DSVD modem reviewed here that needs additional I/O resources (one IRQ and one I/O address) to enable its DSVD functionality. Because HeadOn relies pretty heavily on its own utilities to make modem connections happen for games, it only supports a limited AT command set, which makes manually configuring it a bit more difficult.

In fact, we fussed with this modem for four hours, and despite a lengthy tech support call and various attempted workarounds with two different systems, we were unable to get the HeadOn to come


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up at all. Given the severe installation difficulties, we can't recommend the HeadOn. It seems Eiger Labs had some good ideas, but their nonstandard, proprietary implementation seems to cause more problems than it solves.

DIAMOND SUPRASONIC 336V+

The SupraSonic 336V+ is Diamond's "high-performance" model, whereas their SupraExpress line is positioned as their "better-value" offering. Given the fact that few applications pound on a modem the way fast-paced games can, you'd do well to shell out the extra bucks and go with the high-performance model. Windows 95 detected the PnP SupraSonic without any hiccups and installed the appropriate driver. The unit also worked fine under DOS, and because it's an external unit, there's no need for a PnP configuration utility.

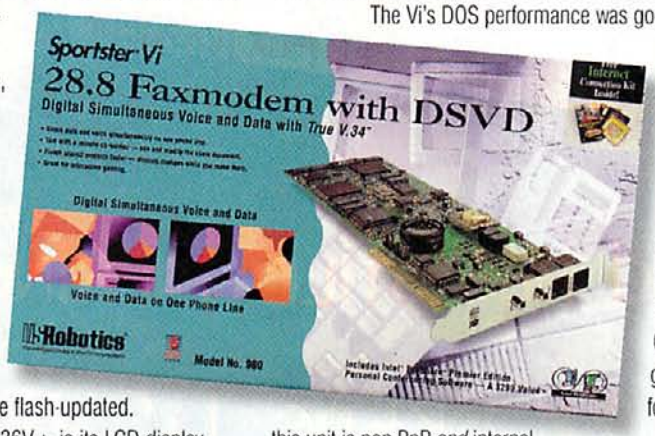
The SupraSonic is a 33.6-Kbps modem, though you'll need another 33.6-Kbps modem at the other end to achieve that speed. Even then, mediocre phone line conditions may negotiate the connection down to 28.8 Kbps or lower. But as more 33.6-Kbps units hit the market, connection speeds hopefully will creep up toward the desired speed.

As firmware updates become available, the SupraSonic's ROM can easily be flash-updated. Another nice feature of the SupraSonic 336V+ is its LCD display, which displays what the unit's doing (dialing, negotiating) and the type of connection that's been established.

Gameplay with DOS titles moved along well with the SupraSonic. Even QUAKE, which really pounds modems with a lot of data, wasn't bad from the client side, which tends to be the slowpoke. NASCAR was very smooth as well. Given its ease of installation, LCD display unit, and good performance running DOS titles, the SupraSonic deserves serious consideration as your next modem.

US ROBOTICS SPORTSTER VI

US Robotics' Sportster Vi is a DSVD modem that ships with a couple of ISP starter kits, a version of Intel's ProShare, and a fax/communications front-end. It's non-PnP, so you're left to muck with jumpers. There's a Windows utility called Comtest, which recommends I/O settings before you actually install the modem. But after we followed its recommendations, Comtest failed to find the modem, despite trying three different I/O settings and two different modems. Also, the driver installation is buried in the Intel ProShare install disks, a minor annoyance. As it turns out, the Sportster Vi's documentation wasn't updated after Windows 95 shipped, so there's no mention of Windows 95 installation, nor is there a configuration file to tell Windows 95 what kind of modem the Vi is. Some deep digging on USR's Web and FTP sites finally turned up the correct .INF file. But because this modem is non-PnP, we had a good deal of trouble clearing I/O conflicts in both our test systems so it would work under Windows 95.



The Vi's DOS performance was good, and gameplay for the most part was smooth. However, the Vi was unable to connect in DSVD mode, and installation under Windows 95 required us to go on a driver quest in addition to the repeated I/O headaches. Overall, the Vi delivers good DOS gaming performance, but because this unit is non-PnP *and* internal, you'd do well to either opt for one of US Robotic's external models. If you have to go internal, you may want to look elsewhere.

Dave Salvator is CGW's Technical Editor, QuakeNet manager and lead saxophonist. The author wishes to thank ZD Labs Modem Guru Jim Wolf for technical consulting on this article.

Modem	Internal or External?	Fax?	Chipset	DSVD?	PnP?	Price
Creative Labs Modem Blaster 28.8 www.creaf.com • (800) 998-5227	Both	Yes	Rockwell	No	Yes	$119
Hayes Accura 28.8 DSVD www.hayes.com • (800) 429-3739	Both	Yes	Rockwell	Yes	Yes	$259
Eiger Labs HeadOn 28.8 DSVD www.eigerlabs.com • (800) OK-EIGER	Internal	Yes	Phylon DSP	Yes	No	$199
Diamond SupraSonic 336V+ www.supra.com • (800) 727-8772	External	Yes	Rockwell	No	Yes	$289
US Robotics Sportster Vi www.usr.com • (800) DIAL-USR	Internal	Yes	TI	Yes	No	$179

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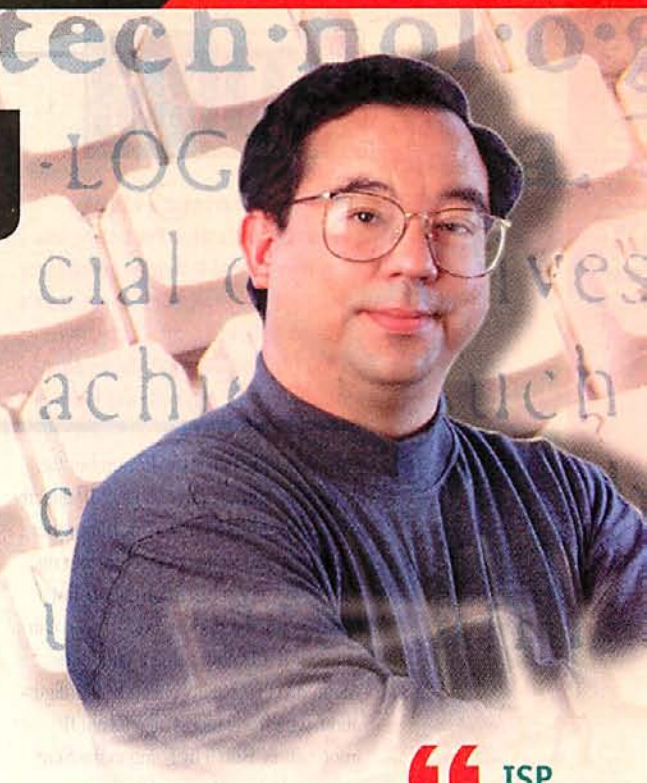
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Net Gaming Boot Camp

Basic Training For Setting Up TCP/IP In Win 95



All right you grunts, so you wanna go out and hunt down the most dangerous prey of all: your fellow humans. You may think all you'll need is a shotgun, a Kevlar vest and an attitude, but that's not enough for the real world. If you want to play, you got to get there—a clean connection is everything. Connecting to the net for some virtual payback to the buddy who fragged you online is easy, if you do it right. So listen up, meathead.

The first thing you need is a good ISP. ISP does *not* stand for Illuminati Society of Patagonia. An ISP is an *Internet service provider*. As opposed to dialing up your buddy direct, Internet connections require you to first hook up to a friendly ISP. Some ISPs have bulletproof installation programs, but others will throw a floppy at you and leave you to rot.

But you've got the right weapon in your kit: Windows 95, which makes connecting to the Net so easy a raw recruit like you can do it. First, the basics.

The Internet uses a network protocol called TCP/IP. Basic TCP/IP setup is a snap. You need the TCP/IP addresses used by your Internet provider, the names of its mail server and news server, an account name and a password.

Next, you need to be able to connect. Having a modem is only the first step; you also need to have dial-up networking and TCP/IP installed. If you don't have any network stuff set up—odds are you don't—you need to load this from the Windows 95 CD. First, add the Dial-Up Adapter. It fools your computer into thinking your modem is a network card, using the Point-to-Point Protocol (PPP), which can also handle other protocols like IPX, NetWare's main protocol.

To install the Dial-Up Adapter, run Control Panel, select Add/Remove Programs, and click on the Windows Setup tab. The Dial-Up Adapter is part of the Communications package: Just double-click on the Modems icon, select Dial-Up Adapter, and let Windows 95 do its thing.

Next, you'll need to install the TCP/IP protocol. Get that Control Panel back up, run the Network applet, and click on the Add button. Double-click on Protocol, select Microsoft, then click on TCP/IP. Windows 95 will install the TCP/IP driver and restart itself.

Now you need to add the TCP/IP addresses of your ISP. There may be a number of different IP addresses, but the three main numbers are your rig's IP number, the primary DNS and the secondary DNS. IP addresses look like numbers with too many decimal places—usually four numbers separated by three periods. DNS stands for *domain name server*; it's your primary link to the outside world. The DNS takes the computer name you send it (say, ZD.COM) and translates it to an IP address that it understands (say, 155.23.48.493). Once TCP/IP has the IP address, it can then communicate with the remote computer.

Because there are only so many possible IP numbers and millions of new computers on the Net, some ISPs are taking advantage of Win 95's Dynamic Host Configuration Protocol (DHCP). This allows the ISP's server to dynamically assign you an IP number each time you log in, keeping more numbers available for general use, since you give the number up when you end your session. Of course, for us gamer types, this method poses a prob-

> "ISP does not stand for Illuminati Society of Patagonia. An ISP is an Internet Service Provider."

LAB NOTES

MMX Gives Unreal a Dose of Reality

Epic MegaGames (**http://www.epicgames.com**) will be one of the first games out to make use of Intel's new MMX technology. MMX adds 57 specialized math instructions to the Pentium and Pentium Pro, enabling greater efficiency among certain types of math functions. The folks at Epic Games are using MMX to make better use of color. The MMX-enabled version of Unreal will use 8-bit textures (i.e., each texture can have up to 256 colors) on polygonal objects. However, each texture will have its own palette, and the game will run in 24-bit color mode, which has the potential of making the game look much better. If Unreal can deliver the performance and gameplay to go with the better look, then this game might just be, well, unreal. The first MMX-enabled chip, the 200-MHz Pentium P55C, should be shipping by the end of this year.

CG TIPS!

▶ If you've just dropped a wad on a spanking new Pentium Pro system, you may have noticed that game performance isn't what you expected. Fear not, there's help available, in the form of a utility called FASTVID. FASTVID can be downloaded from the Action Games forum on CompuServe (GO ACTION). Written by John Hinckley of Vistapro fame, FASTVID streamlines memory accesses and data transfers by the Pentium Pro. For example, a Pentium 166 may run QUAKE at 11–13 fps (at 640x480); with the same graphics card, a Pentium Pro may get QUAKE at 16–17 fps. FASTVID can boost the performance up to 22–24 fps.

lem: What the hell is my IP number *this* time? Games that can use TCP/IP directly will require you to know your IP number so other gamers can connect to your rig. Kali95 will report this information, but if you're going direct over TCP/IP, you can get your IP number using an undocumented Win 95 utility called IP Configuration, which will report all relevant IP information. Run it by going to the Start menu, selecting Run, and typing "winipcfg". (If your ISP has assigned you a static IP address, you won't have to worry about this; check with your ISP).

There's one last piece of the puzzle you need to get from the Windows 95 CD: the Dial-Up Scripting Tool. Dial-up scripts are strings of commands and responses, like a DOS batch file, that automatically log you on with your ISP. The Dial-Up Scripting Tool is on the CD in the directory \admin\apptools\dscript. Install it by running the Add Programs applet in the Control Panel, selecting the System tab, then finding the correct directory on the CD. When you install the scripting tool, some sample scripts are installed; you can modify them, but the tweaks aren't necessarily straightforward. Because each ISP handles logins in its own quirky way, you may need to contact your ISP's tech support desk for help. Microsoft's Plus pack has an Internet Wizard installation tool that eases TCP/IP setup, though manual setup will also get you there.

AVOIDING THE THUMB SCREWS

If you have a good ISP, then they've probably tried to make installation fairly painless, but the results are often mixed. For example, AT&T's Worldnet software uses its own TCP/IP software to connect to the Net, rather than Windows 95's protocol stack. It works, but it makes installing other TCP/IP applications difficult. I use a local ISP that has one of the best installation routines I've seen. It even configured the dial-up script for my connection; all I had to do was add the IP addresses for the DNSs and the phone number I wanted to use to connect.

OK, you've installed TCP/IP, got the Dial-Up Adapter working and can even run Netscape or Internet Explorer to connect to outside Web sites. What about games? Unfortunately, there's no standard way to connect to other games. Online gaming services, like the Total Entertainment Network, MPath, and Dwango charge money, but they facilitate the process of finding other gamers and their networks have some provisions for speeding up overall game performance. Tools like Kali95 (see last month's column), let you play your IPX-networked games over TCP/IP. Some games, like QUAKE, can use TCP/IP directly. So until some of the standards begin to shake out, it will really depend on the game.

Once you can actually connect, there are still two big headaches you might encounter. The first is modem hassles. Your modem and those used by your ISP may not get along very well. I had enormous problems with US Robotics Sportster modems with one particular ISP, but have had no problems with the same modem in connecting to CompuServe or other services. Contact your service provider's tech support for advice.

The second problem is more subtle, perhaps more insidious, and is difficult to control: *latency*. The Internet is a huge network of interconnected computers. If you're playing a game with a friend through the Internet, the data packets may have passed through a number of computers in a complex relay (called *hops*) to get from your friend's system to yours. Even in the best of connections, there's a bit of time delay added—this time delay is called latency.

Recently, I participated in a NetMech game using Kali95, and discovered that one particular Mech couldn't be killed, even when four other players were pounding on him. He wasn't cheating; latency was the culprit. His NetMech program was out of sync with the others, and so the damage from weapons fire wasn't being properly recorded.

GET THE MACHINE THAT GOES...

You can test the latency in a crude way by using an undocumented utility called PING that exists in your Windows 95 COMMAND directory. To use it, you need to know either the domain name or IP address of the server in question. You bring up a DOS prompt in a DOS box (i.e., run the MS-DOS command prompt from the Windows 95 task bar). Type "ping *domain name*" or "ping *IP address*".

PING will respond with messages that indicate the number of milliseconds it took to send a packet to the other server and get a reply back. You'll find typical response times of 200–300 milliseconds over the Internet, which can be too long for some games. Modems compound the problem somewhat with their own latency, which can range from 170 to about 250 milliseconds. So between the Internet and your modem, you may get upward of a half-second delay. For garden-variety data transfers and Web surfing, it's not much of a problem. But games requiring latencies of less than 200 milliseconds are probably not good candidates for play over the Internet. Unfortunately, the internal network latency of a multiplayer game isn't published in the documentation, so trial and error, or a call to the game vendor's tech support rep, may be the only answer.

There's a lot more to the Internet than we can cover here, but you've got the basics. Now get out there and frag somebody.

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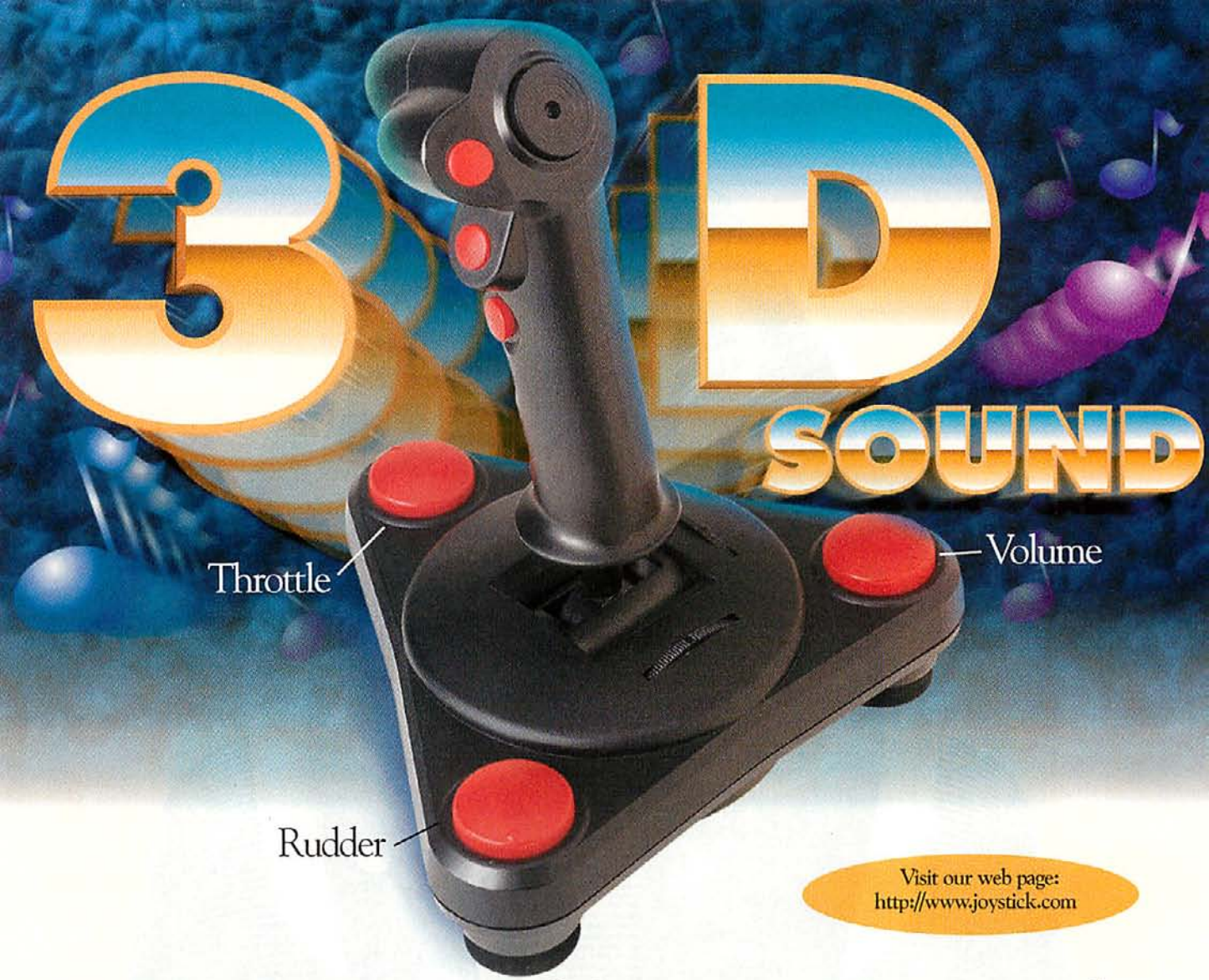
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On The Ball

New 3D Controller Lets You Do It All

By Thierry Nguyen

For WOLFENSTEIN 3D through DUKE NUKEM 3D, the keyboard was the controller. For QUAKErs out there, the mouse is the master. Now, Space'Tec wants to make a rubber ball on a stick your controller for any 3D action game.

Space'Tec's SpaceOrb 360 features a "powersensor" orb that can be pushed, pulled and twisted; it also has six buttons and software to make it programmable.

So how does it play? Pretty good, once you get used to it. The fact that you can simultaneously control all six degrees of motion can be pretty daunting to those who use the keyboard a lot. Initially, you may have some trouble, but with the software training utility and more play, it'll grow on you. After getting used to it, I was able to circle strafe with *extreme* ease in DUKE NUKEM 3D, and was able to easily outmaneuver the robots in DESCENT II.

The SpaceOrb comes with preconfigured software for DESCENT, DOOM II, DUKE NUKEM 3D, HEXEN, HERETIC and MECHWARRIOR 2. QUAKE config files weren't available at press time, but Space-Tec said that new files will be made available on their FTP site. For now, the software only has a batch file that will make your SpaceOrb substitute for a mouse.

The main technical annoyance is the use of a serial port. You need a free COM port for this controller. If you're like most people, who have a mouse on COM1 and a modem on COM2, you are going to have to unplug one of them and plug in the SpaceOrb every time you want to use it, or buy a new serial port and get into the fun of sharing IRQs and extra COM ports.

With customization options and the promise of future game support, the SpaceOrb 360 looks like a good controller for 3D gamers.

APPEAL: 3D action gamers looking for something better than the keyboard, or something new altogether.

PROS: Good design with intuitive control input for 3D games; customizable; comes with preconfigured drivers for many 3D action games.

CONS: An initial learning curve is required; installation can lead to hardware conflicts.

CG RATED

Price: $99
System Requirements: 486-33 processor, 3–30 MB hard drive space, CD-ROM drive, DOS or Windows 95, free serial (COM) port.
Manufacturer: SpaceTec IMC, Lowell, Massachusetts (508) 970-0330 www.spacetec.com
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by Dave Salvator

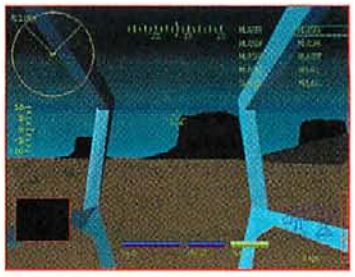
Matrox has entered the 3D fray with Mystique, an SGRAM-based accelerator that delivers screaming 2D Windows performance, solid DOS performance, and good 3D performance as well. Mystique supports Microsoft's Direct3D API, so it will run those titles when they begin to ship this holiday season. To get the party started until those titles arrive in force, Matrox is bundling Virgin/Criterion's SCORCHED PLANET, Activision's MECHWARRIOR 2, and Sony/Psygnosis's DESTRUCTION DERBY 2, though DERBY won't quite be ready when Mystique ships (buyers will receive a coupon). What's really inviting about Mystique is its price: $199 for the 2 MB version, and $279 for the 4 MB version.

Despite a tradition of blazing WinBench performance, past Matrox accelerators had less-than-stellar DOS performance and compatibility problems with some DOS titles, but Matrox has taken these problems to heart, and the result is flawless, speedy DOS-title performance with EF2000, DUKE NUKEM 3D, THE NEED FOR SPEED SE, and QUAKE. Frame rates on all these titles are smooth, even at some higher VESA display modes, thanks in part to Mystique's VESA 2.0 support in its firmware.

Mystique continues the Matrox tradition of kicking ass and taking names in 2D Windows performance, with WinBench scores staying in the 29–30 Graphic WinMarks range at 800x600x256 colors, 800x600x16,530 colors, and 1024x768x256 colors. FLIGHT UNLIMITED 95, which uses DirectDraw, ran well at 640x480 with all rendering features cranked up.

On the 3D side, Mystique offers hardware acceleration of perspective-correct texture mapping, Gouraud shading, texture transparency, double-buffering and Z-buffering. Of the Direct3D titles that were far enough along to run, Microsoft's HELLBENDER looked pretty impressive, and the enhanced scenes sped along nicely compared to the title running sans hardware acceleration. Of the bundleware we saw, the Mystique-accelerated version of MECHWARRIOR 2 was dramatically improved over the unaccelerated version, with all ground surfaces beautifully texture-mapped. And despite a lack of bilinear filtering, these texture-map surfaces looked smooth.

Matrox decided not to have Mystique support bilinear interpolation in favor of keeping frame rates in the 30-plus fps range, since this feature essentially quadruples the computation involved in rendering every texel (textured pixel). Matrox believes that developers will instead favor a form of texture compression called Color Lookup Table 8, or CLUT 8. This form of compression gives each texture its own 8-bit (256-color) palette, as opposed to storing the textures in 16-bit RGB format. The result is that more-detailed palette information for each texture can be stored in video memory and bilinear interpolation won't be as necessary to clean up blocky texture coloration. The texture maps on MECHWARRIOR 2 use CLUT 8 running on Mystique, and the result is impressive. Irrespective of whether a Direct3D title uses this form of texture compression, Mystique will accelerate it.





VIVE LA DIFFERENCE The Mystique-accelerated MECHWARRIOR 2 (right) adds rich textures to scene landscapes while keeping the game's overall frame rate smooth.

All in all, Matrox has put together a very fast 2D board with pretty impressive 3D performance as well. Mystique is very competitively priced in both its 2 MB and 4 MB versions, and would be a solid addition to a tricked-out gaming rig.



Price: 2 MB, $199; 4 MB $279
Manufacturer: Matrox, Inc.
Dorval, Quebec, Canada
www.matrox.com
(514) 685-7230
Reader Service #: 317

APPEAL: Gamers who want to accelerate their DOS titles and be able to get more out of Direct3D games when they ship en masse.

PROS: A 2D screamer that delivers solid 3D performance as well. Nice added touch of embedded utility for changing resolutions.

CONS: Does not support bilinear filtering, which can smooth overall image quality. Minor texture distortion in MECHWARRIOR 2. The installation is a bit confusing.

CG RATED

Crystal Clear Sound

But Not Quite Ready For Prime Time

by Sheldon Leemon

The TidalWave 32 is touted as an outstanding performer with an especially easy Plug-and-Play (PnP) installation. In fact, the board does deliver good overall sound quality, but its irksome installation utility doesn't quite live up to its claims.



The TidalWave 32, like most recent sound cards, is completely software-configurable. But here's where it gets kludgy. Windows 95 detected the PnP board's presence at startup, but the install routine didn't finish the job. According to the documentation, drivers for the card's four components (audio, wavetable synth, joystick port, and IDE CD-ROM controller) must be installed individually, in a particular order. The installation software originally set the wavetable device to IRQ 10. An error message indicated that this device wasn't working, so we had to manually switch it to IRQ 7, using the Device Manager, in order to get it to work.

Once we slogged through the installation, the card sounded very good, thanks in part to a 2 MB General MIDI wavetable patch set. Most of the instruments, as well as drum kits, sounded very good, though the horns were somewhat thin. Supposedly, the card can record and play back audio at 48KHz (DAT quality), but the bundled wave editor's maximum sampling rate was 44 KHz (audio CD quality). We couldn't test the full-duplex audio feature—useful for speaker phone–like applications such as Internet Phone—because the drivers weren't quite ready.

Some games like WARCRAFT II can "AutoDetect" audio hardware, but they were unable to automatically identify this card as Sound Blaster compatible. In these cases, manually tweaking the sound card settings usually fixes the problem, but DUKE NUKEM 3D couldn't produce more than monaural sound with the TidalWave's Sound Blaster emulation. In Windows 95 however, we came across no other hiccups, and titles using DirectSound worked fine, with General MIDI music sounding very good.

Crystal Computer is a relative newcomer to the sound card arena, and while the TidalWave 32 gets some things right, its rough edges can't be overlooked. If you're looking for good gaming audio and clean General MIDI, and don't mind massaging its installation a little, TidalWave 32 delivers on much of its promise.

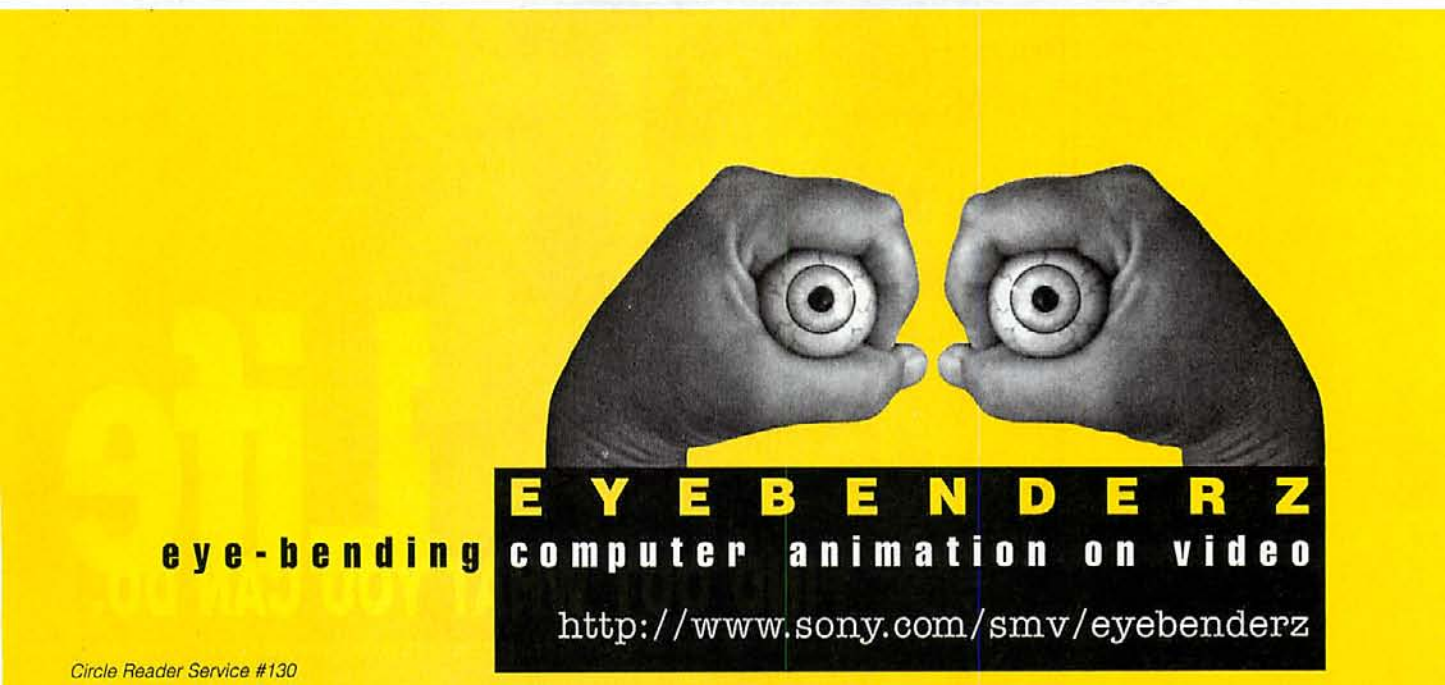
APPEAL: For those interested in good gaming audio and wavetable synthesis with General MIDI.

PROS: Good sound once installed, fairly solid Sound Blaster compatibility.

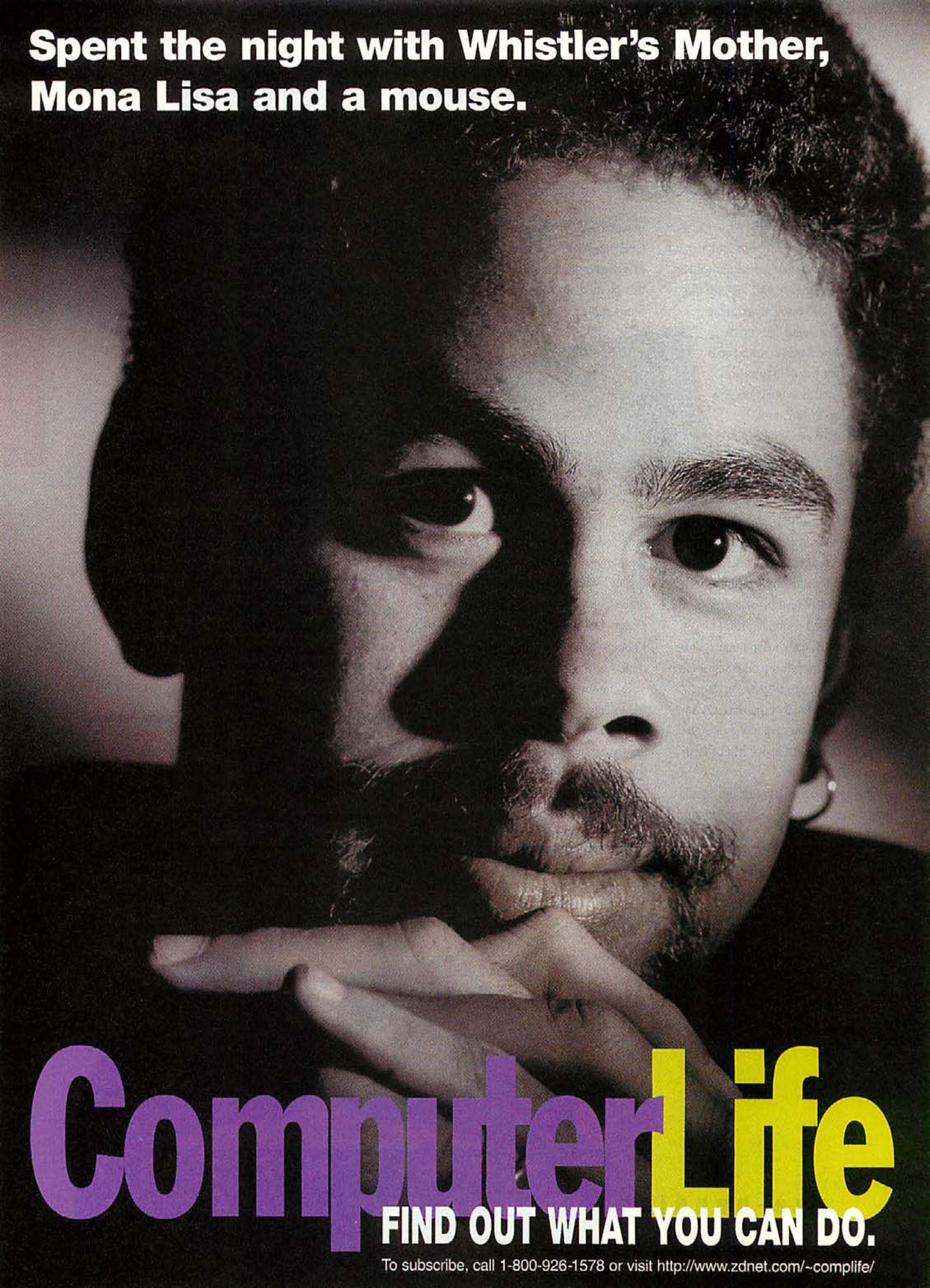
CONS: Clumsy installation that is somewhat at odds with the card's lofty "Plug and Play" claims.

CG RATED

Price: About $175
Manufacturer: Crystal Computer Corp.
San Jose, CA
(408) 383-2100
Reader Service #: 339



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2,000 Cooks In The Kitchen

Designing For Absolute Chaos In Origin's ULTIMA ONLINE



Designing an adventure game for one person to play isn't terribly difficult; designing it for eight people is probably eight times more complex. Hundreds of strange events unfold when players begin to do unexpected things. Now imagine designing a graphic adventure for *thousands* of players, with a consistent story throughout an enormous game world, multiple quests, rewards and contingencies. It's a challenge the people who "create worlds" at Origin are facing every day on the ULTIMA ONLINE project.

Once finished, this multiplayer blockbuster is supposed to have a fully detailed and self-sustaining virtual world larger than that of all the ULTIMAS combined. Two thousand players can participate simultaneously, each pursuing their own quests and agendas. In short, ULTIMA ONLINE hopes to deliver on the "cyberspace" promise by offering a virtual world more exciting and rich than our real world. That is, if the designers can ever figure out how to get the thing going.

WORLD GENESIS

With a name like Starr Long, you might think ULTIMA ONLINE's producer would be a former adult film star. Actually, he's a former play-tester. Long started at Origin in the quality assurance department, play-testing games. His numerous suggestions landed him in the role of associate producer for ULTIMA 9, but he dreamed of creating a multiplayer ULTIMA. Richard Garriott, a.k.a. Lord British, ultimately gave Long a shot at spearheading the project.

"The original idea," Long says, "was to take an ULTIMA and just make it so that you could have a party of people travel together." That idea soon withered when the design team began looking at MUDs and the large number of players that could participate simultaneously in those environments. Unfortunately, most MUDs require a system administrator for every dozen players or so, to constantly reset locations and tweak the game. This structure, in which a region is reset after the current players leave the area, is called the "room mentality." Though typical of many multiplayer environments, it makes for a static world and doesn't give players a good reason to revisit game regions. With this consideration in mind, the design team decided early on that ULTIMA ONLINE should be a dynamic world, and a world that keeps itself in balance.

"Part of the fun will be that we don't know exactly what will happen once we turn it on," admits Long. "We will have a game administrator who will be watching the world state, though. He'll sort of be playing POPULOUS, if you will. He'll watch the resources in the world and tweak and adjust things anytime it gets out of whack."



SKELETON CREW In ULTIMA ONLINE, you'll view monsters from the familiar overhead perspective seen in earlier ULTIMA adventures—even when you're running away.

A DELICATE BALANCE

Designing a dynamic world is tricky business. How do you create enough quests to interest 2,000 people? Origin's solution: don't. Create a world with enough logical conditions that it will generate its *own* quests. For example, consider a cave in the virtual world. Any self-respecting cave needs a monster, so you assign the cave a "need for monster" request of the game-world engine. Poof! A monster, let's say a dragon, is then spontaneously created in the cave. Dragons are big eaters, so the dragon sends out a "need for meat" request. Meat, in the

> **"Imagine designing an adventure for *thousands* of players in an enormous game world with multiple quests and rewards."**



DOUBLE YOUR DANGER Chatting with other players in Ultima Online is a great feature, but debating too long can bring other entities to the party.

form of deer, roams the forest outside the cave, so the dragon's life consists of leaving the cave to consume deer. If something happens that lowers the deer population (bad weather, overhunting or a game administrator strategically killing off deer), the dragon will have to widen its search for meat, which might lead it to the sheep pastures outside town.

At this point nonplayer characters (NPCs) can be useful to tell real players about a ravenous dragon roaming the countryside. NPCs can also sweeten the pot by offering rewards to anyone who can slay it. But what are they going to say?

"All of the [NPCs'] conversations come from a dynamic conversation pool which is linked to the world state," explains Long. This means that if you, as a player, were to walk into this town, any one of the villagers will say something like "Hey, we need your help–this dragon is eating all our sheep." Thus, the "Kill the Dragon" quest is under way—succeed, and the villagers will handsomely reward you.

In addition to quests generated by the world itself, because of the "world balance" dynamics, other quests are generated by "quest" formulae based on what the game NPCs need.

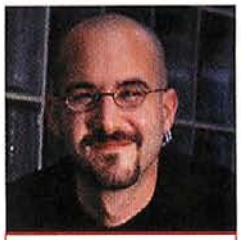
"You can play a traditional hack-and-slash role in this game," says Long, "or you can choose to play a nontraditional RPG role—you can be the baker."

As in earlier Ultimas, a player can mix flour and water and bake it in an oven to make bread. In Ultima Online, you can sell the bread for hard cash (to both other players and NPCs) and be on your way down a new "virtual career path."

"If you don't want to do any of that, if you want to just hang out in the tavern and drink simulated ale, you can do that, too," Long says with a grin.

CHAOS SOUP

Despite the strength of a condition-generated world, there are other problems to deal with. What happens when a player leaves the game? This can occur under several situations, but the two most common are when a player finishes a nightly gaming session or when a glitch in a player's Internet connection bounces him or her from the game.



STAR OF THE SHOW "We're doing our damnedest to make sure this will feel like a real world," says Starr Long, Ultima Online producer.

"We've debated it back and forth and changed it about 25 times so far," says Long. "The easiest way, of course, is to just have the player vanish, but, fictionally, that really sucks."

Another problem that plagues multiplayer games is every gamer's tendency toward homicide. New players are often easy marks for more experienced players who want their possessions.

To lessen the gap between experienced and new players, the designers decided to create a skill-based character system as opposed to level-based (as in many traditional pencil-and-paper RPGs). There are dozens of skills to know, from swordplay to picking locks, but a player will only be able to be proficient in several skills at a time. Work on a skill and it will increase; leave a skill idle, and it will degrade.

And how about sociopathic players? "There's going to be a lot of them," Long admits. But to balance the scales, the urban areas of the game will tightly enforce the law. Powerful guards will be posted on nearly every corner, and if a player breaks the law in a town, he'll be tagged an outlaw. If he returns to town, the guards will immediately converge. Outside the cities, it will be a different matter. "It's chaos," he says. "We're not saying that you can't be a sociopath, but it's going to be a very different game for you."

IT'S THE GRAY MATTER, STUPID

Despite the challenges in dealing with so many variables, the payoff could be unprecedented depth in a graphic adventure. Who knows, maybe people who've had a taste of Ultima Online won't want to go back to boxed games. "You're never going to get the gameplay out of a computer that you can get out of another person," Long says. "Other people are what really make games interesting.

"During our public pre-alpha test, we had people who literally did not log off for a week. Groups of players formed tribes, and at the end of the test there was a huge battle between the two largest tribes. None of that we set up—we gave them the world to play in, and human nature took over."

Will Ultima Online and others of its kind descend into tribal warfare? We'll have to find out. But at least we'll have the opportunity—Origin created the world, the gameplay is up to you.

When Is Ultima Online?

As you read this, Ultima Online will most likely be in beta testing. Origin hasn't announced an official "live release" date yet, but you can check the company's Ultima Online Web page for updates: **http://www.owo.com/uo.html**. Once the game is released, it will be administered entirely by Origin, and access will be via a 32-bit Internet connection (though a 14.4 Kbps modem will suffice in terms of throughput).



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Circle Reader Service #249



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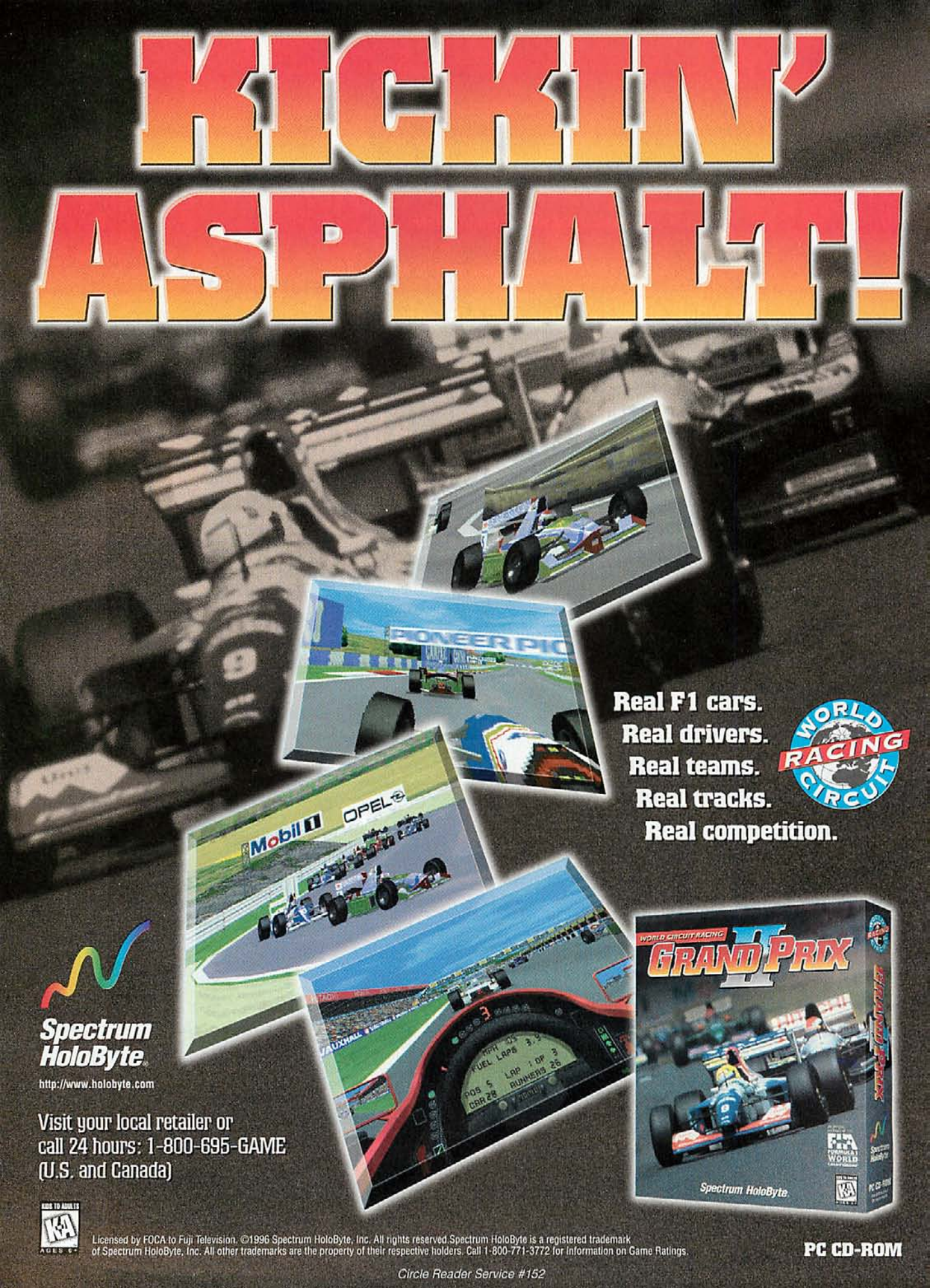
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PC CD-ROM

Circle Reader Service #152

Tex Murphy, Part Deux

Tired Of Walking Out Of Interactive Movies? Try THE PANDORA DIRECTIVE



It all started so simply. Tex Murphy, old-style P.I., is approached by Gordon Fitzpatrick to locate an old friend, Thomas Malloy. It's just a whim, so he says, brought on by seeing Malloy's picture in the newspaper. Murphy, down on his luck and needing cash, takes the case. Before long, he's involved with serial killers, the 1947, Roswell, NM UFO; conspiracies; double-crosses; inscrutable Mayan references; and a mysterious beautiful woman. Finding missing persons was never quite like this in Hammett and Chandler. Tex begins to wonder if he might not be in a little over his head, but it's too late to turn back now. For better or worse, he must follow the twisting trail to the end.

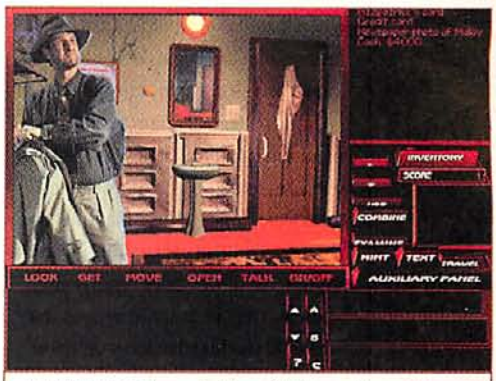
THE PANDORA DIRECTIVE, the sequel to Access's hit UNDER A KILLING MOON, is a complicated story, and a big part of the game is watching that story unfold. So it wouldn't do to give away too much of the plot. Besides, how things go in the game depends in large measure on how you play the part of Tex Murphy.

FORKS IN THE ROAD

You can choose from three main paths through PANDORA, leading to seven different possible endings. The routes can be summed up as "nice guy" (Mission Street), "neutral guy" (Lombard Street) and "nasty guy" (Boulevard of Broken Dreams). The Mission Street path has two endings, Lombard one, and Boulevard four.

Tex's actions in the game, particularly how he deals with people in certain situations, determine the route and conclusion. So it isn't any one event but the development of Tex's personality over time that determines the outcome—as well as sev-

> "The ability to develop Tex's personality is worth the price of admission all by itself."



MURPHY, P.I. Players familiar with UNDER A KILLING MOON will feel right at home in THE PANDORA DIRECTIVE. It features the same engine with an identical interface as its predecessor.

CRYSTAL BALL

Gazing into the crystal ball this month, your adventure-game soothsayer sees a famous man...a big man...a man who has played Fred Flintstone in the movies. Yes, it's John Goodman, and with him are members of the seminal '70s comedy troupe Firesign Theater. What are these clowns doing in *CGW*'s crystal ball, you ask? Why, they're involved in a full-on, hilarious-looking parody of one of the best-selling computer games of all time. We'd tell you which one, but we're getting all misty-eyed just thinking about the comic possibilities. Look for a sneak preview next month.



Another celebrity in the crystal ball is horrormeister Wes Craven, who is collaborating with Cyberdreams to create his first computer game, Principles of Fear. We don't know much about this late '97 release yet, other than that it's (what else?) a psychological thriller, told from the perspectives of a man and his 10-year-old daughter, with much of the action taking place within (what else?) the dreams of the characters. Uh, Freddy is dead, isn't he?

CG TIPS!

EIGHT MONTHS A WEEK

The big gaffe in The Pandora Directive is the Mayan date puzzle, based on the 260-day Mayan calendar. To open one of the Pandora boxes, you first figure out some Mayan dates (which is easy), then calculate what they would be in our calendar, and line them up on the box. I thought this would be a snap, since I happen to have a Mayan calendar (really). As it turned out, however, the puzzle designer set it up wrong, inadvertently treating Mayan days as months. This gives results rather far from reality. I discussed the matter with Access, who were a little nonplused by their error. However, after double-checking the material in the game, they believe that if players work on the puzzle using only the clues provided, they will come up with the solution the game expects. So, don't go running off to the library for a book on Mayan civilization. Use only what is provided in the game itself to solve the puzzle.

eral smaller incidents along the way. There is definitely more here than solving a few puzzles.

PANDORA also presents two modes of play: Entertainment and Game Player. The two coincide fairly closely in most respects; the main difference is that Entertainment can give you answers if you're stuck, while Game Player has more points and a few extra puzzles.

Entertainment mode doesn't tell you everything, however. The answer screen will get you through the adventure part of the game, including conversations. With the Pandora puzzle boxes and a few other things though, you're strictly on your own. If you find them too hard, you can type in a code to solve the puzzle automatically, at a certain cost in points, but you won't get any hints toward the solution.

In Game Player mode, no hints or help are offered; you depend strictly on your own brainwork. Additionally, the puzzles at this level come with bonus points and either a time limit or a move limit. For a time-limited puzzle, you have a certain amount of "free time" on the clock. When that runs out, both regular points and bonus points begin decreasing. The bonus can run down to zero, but most of the time the regular points maintain a minimum regardless of how long it takes to reach a solution. The move-limited puzzles are similar, except that you have free moves instead of free time. If you use up your free moves, once again both bonus and regular points start decreasing.

Should you find that too tough, you have the option to switch to Entertainment level. This is a one-way street, though; you can't go back to Game Player mode.



Price: $79.95
System Requirements: IBM-compatible 486/66, 8 MB RAM (16 MB recommended), 10 MB hard drive space, VESA-compliant SVGA display, 2x CD-ROM (4x recommended), mouse. Supports all major sound boards (16-bit recommended).
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designers: Chris Jones, Aaron Conners
Publisher: Access Software Inc. Salt Lake City, Utah. (800) 800-4880
Reader Service #: 342

DUCK YOU SUCKER

The game's interface is simple and mostly mouse-controlled, although hot keys are available for many actions. You move around in a 3D, 360-degree environment. You can look up to the ceiling, down to the floor, to either side and behind you. Importantly, you can also stand on your toes or crouch close to the ground. In many instances, you must change your viewing angle to see or find things. Staying at eye level is a good way to get stuck quickly.

Traveling between locations in the game has been made very easy. You're given three maps: one for Chandler Street (Tex's neighborhood), one for San Francisco (his city) and one for North America. To go someplace, you simply display the appropriate map, click the desired location, and you're there. If a location has several areas, you can narrow your choice to the particular one you want.

Interacting with the world is simple. As the cursor moves over objects or people on the screen, words such as "Look and Move" or "Look and Talk" light up, showing your options. The right mouse button cycles the choices, and left-clicking chooses the action.

Inventory items are displayed in the upper right, and there appears to be no limit to how much you can carry. Objects usually disappear once they've been used, which helps reduce clutter. Some items can be used in combination with others—another important feature.

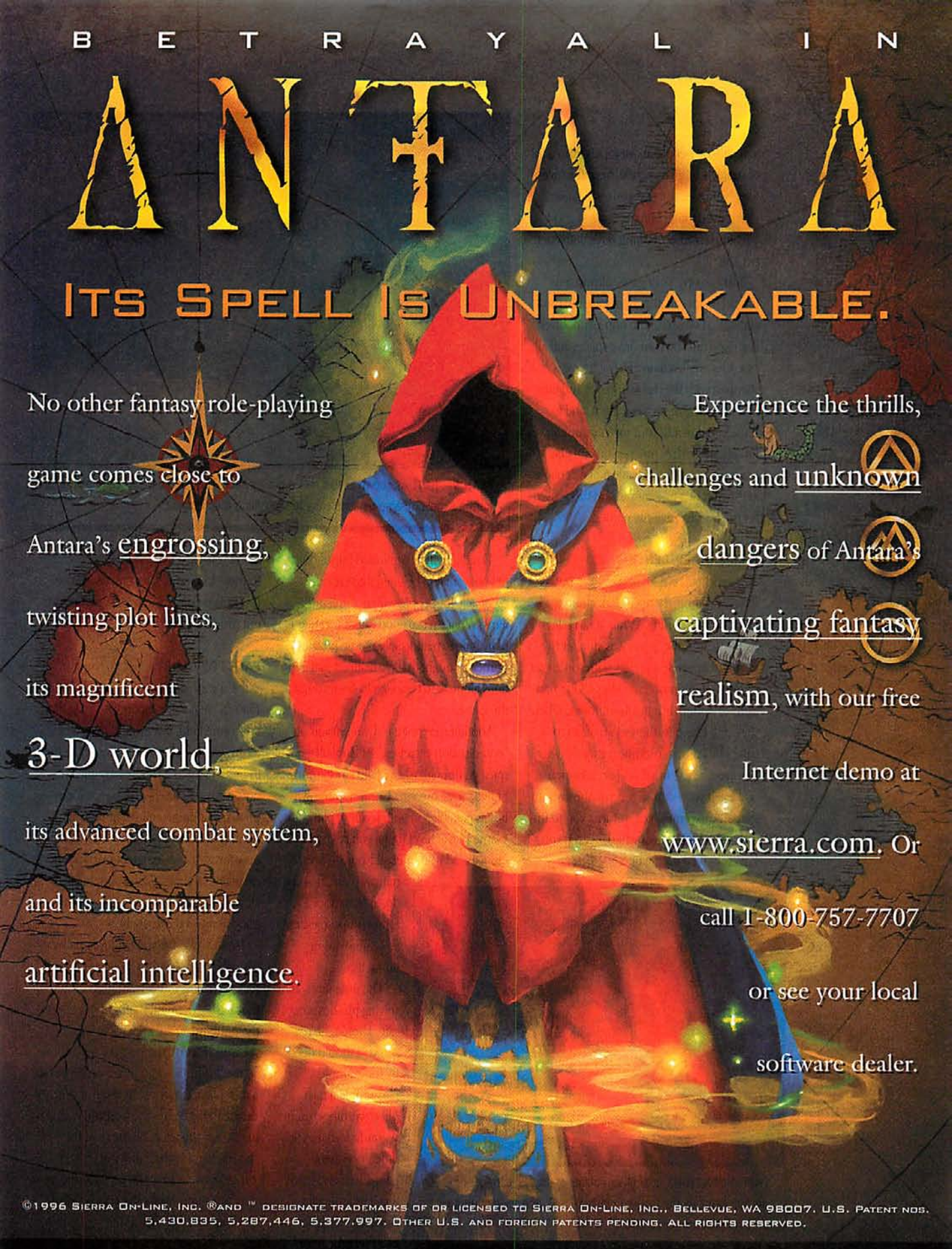
Conversations are of three main types: automatic, personal and informational. Automatic conversations happen spontaneously at certain points during play. How they go and what's said depends largely on how Tex has been behaving up to that moment.

Personal chats generally occur when you talk to someone for the first time, or when Tex is trying to get on his girlfriend's good side. Typically during these interludes you have three choices of response, and often these correspond to the three game paths, but not always. And you can't be sure of what exactly Tex will say. The manual recommends saving before conversations, and so do I.

During informational conversations,



BODY SNATCHER The original pod man, Kevin McCarthy, is cast as Gordon Fitzpatrick, the man who hires you for your latest case.

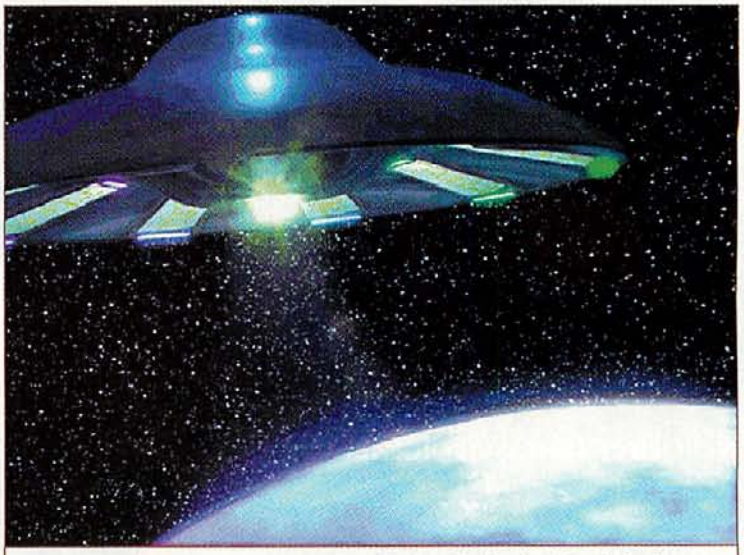


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you can ask people about topics from a list of subjects or give or show from the inventory. Naturally, not everyone will know about everything, but it's usually a good idea to go over everything once with each person.

You can save your game almost anytime. The save feature is, in fact, the most elaborate I've seen. The number of saves is limited only by your drive space, and all save files are less than 5K. Each save is stamped with the real-world day and time and the game day and location, and to these you can add your own comments. Finally, more than one person can play at the same time: You provide a player name at the start of a new game, and this is used for the on-disk save-file names.



PLAN 9—NOT! As shown in this movie-quality shot, The Pandora Directive's plot goes from a simple missing-persons case to something much bigger.

PUZZLING EVIDENCE

PANDORA has a lot going for it, but as with any game, there's a dark cloud to go with the silver lining. While it ran relatively cleanly, the game was subject to transient crashes, typically with some sort of DOS4GW problem. They didn't happen very often, but it was annoying when they did. Happily, there is an offset to this: The game remembers exactly where you were at the time, and on relaunch will ask if you want to resume the current game. Answering "yes" returns you to the point at which you crashed, even if you haven't saved for a while.

The dialogue is captioned throughout (if you want it to be), and that's good, especially for people with hearing problems. What isn't so good is that you need to be able to hear to solve some puzzles. Someone ought to have realized that captions alone aren't enough to get through the game.

Another sore point is the inclusion of "coordination exercises." At Roswell, you must go through a laser field a minimum of five times, on one occasion running as fast as possible, on both levels of play. On Game Player level (only) you have to cross the Mayan Fireball Room—lava, narrow paths, flaming death from above—for no purpose except as a time-wasting obstacle.

The time limits for solving puzzles are silly. There is no reason you should need to, for example, reassemble a torn photo within so many seconds. It makes no difference in the game itself and lends an air of artificiality. And if the designers insist on time limits, at the very least they could have been fair to those in Game Player mode and *not* had bonus points and puzzle points run out simultaneously.

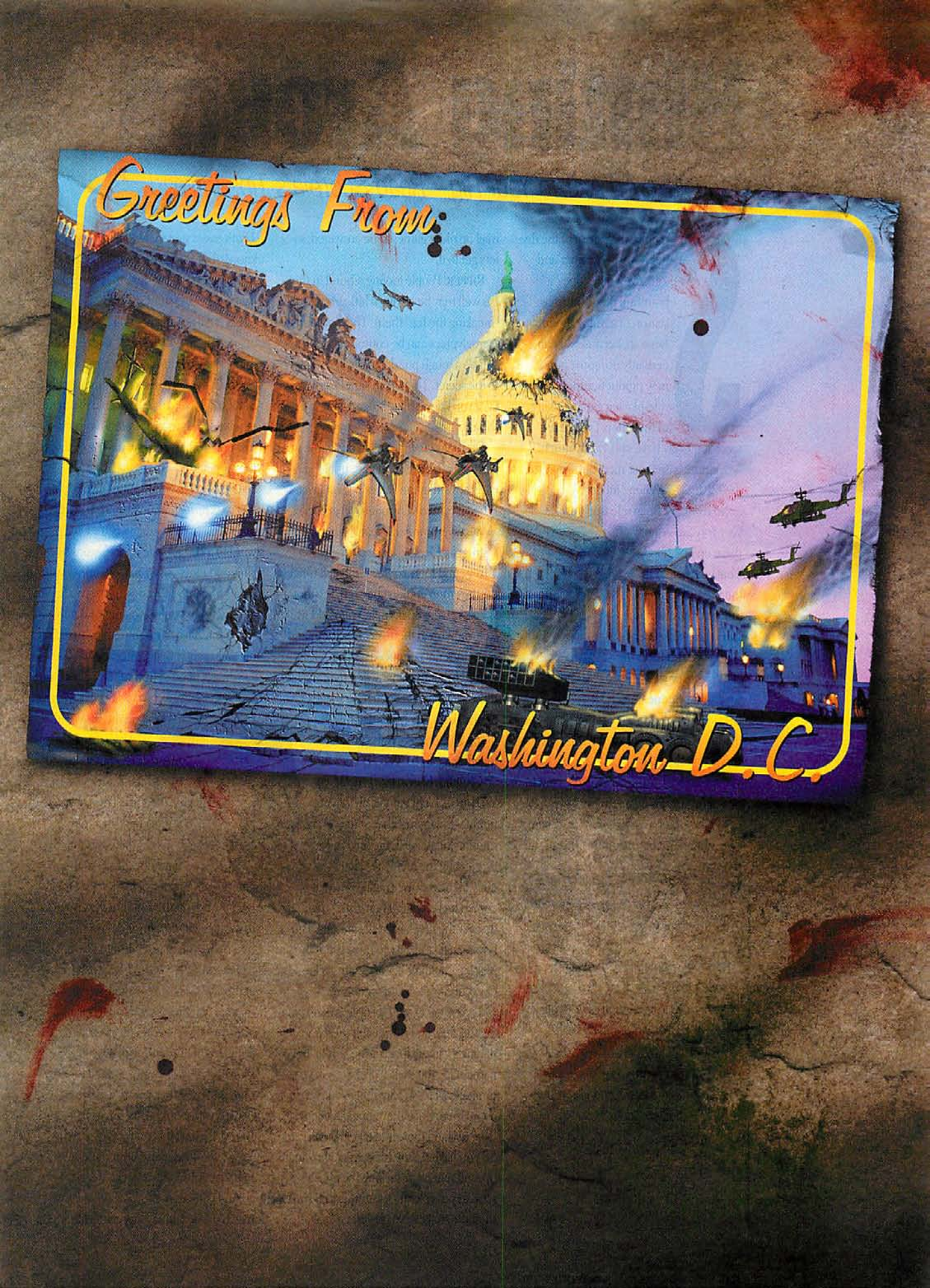


FACT OR FICTION? In another cutscene, players learn of some connection between the Roswell crash in 1947 and Tex's current case in San Francisco, circa 2043.

PATHS OF GLORY

Despite these criticisms, THE PANDORA DIRECTIVE is still a superior entry in the adventure field. It is evident that Access took a great deal of care (most of the time) to provide a game that's enjoyable for both novice and experienced players. Complete captioning, dual-play mode, a detailed hint system, a simple interface, easy travel, a wide range of puzzles, an excellent save facility and an interesting story line all combine to make a pretty good game in themselves.

Best of all is the the multiple paths. The ability to develop the lead character's personality in certain ways–ways that have a definite, material effect on the conclusion, irrespective of puzzle-solving–is worth the price of admission by itself. This is something you expect in a role-playing game, but rarely if ever see there. To find it in an adventure is amazing, to say the least. So don't let the "interactive movie" label put you off; THE PANDORA DIRECTIVE is worthy of your attention, whatever your level of gaming expertise.

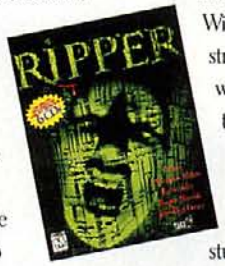

Greetings From:
Washington D.C.

Hinting Around

Don't Take An Axe To Your Rig—Read Scorpia's Tips Instead

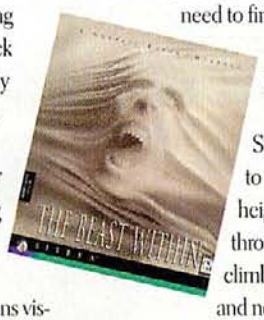
So here we are, out of the dry (gamewise) summer and into, everyone hopes, a bountiful pre-Christmas season of gaming. I sure hope so, because we can certainly use some good new products, especially role-playing games. Many of the letters I've been receiving lately have said, pretty much, "adventure games are nice, but where are the CRPGs??" Where, indeed?

So few have been released this year you can count them on one hand. That's dismal, to say the least. The renaissance of the adventure game has really overshadowed the RPG the last couple of years. So we can only hope that, before too long, rumors of such games as the new MIGHT & MAGIC, ULTIMA IX, LANDS OF LORE II, DAGGERFALL, WIZARDRY VIII, an so on., will turn out to be reality (any game not in my claws, or not in the stores, is a rumor as far as I am concerned). In the meantime, there's still mail on older games to be answered, so let's get to it.



RIPPER: People fooling around in the Isis well may be having a little trouble "breaking the Ice" (heh). The Egyptian hieroglyphics can be confusing, and this can be a tough puzzle until you catch on to the secret. Then it's as simple as A, B, C, if you know where to start, and you should.

STONEKEEP: Fighting in this game was pretty easy for the most part, until the party arrived in the Palace of Shadows. Then it turned very tough, very quickly. With every combat a real life-or-death struggle, I looked around for a better way, and found one: invisibility! Once the group couldn't be seen, the monsters were duck soup. We could walk right up to them, beat on them and they never noticed a thing. Good stuff! Just remember when fighting those skeletons that you have to pick up the skulls, swords and helms they drop, or the critters will come back together again.



GABRIEL KNIGHT 2: THE BEAST WITHIN: A lot of gamers are having trouble finding matches at the hunting lodge. First, the fire has to be going in the fireplace. That means visiting all the rooms upstairs, including a certain locked one. Then check the mantle over the fireplace very carefully. The box is small and easy to miss. But if the fire is going, the matches are there, so look close, and you should see them.

LANDS OF LORE I: People are still playing this one, and still having the same difficulties. One of those is the White Tower, particularly the snakes upstairs. Unfortunately, there isn't anything you can do about them once they appear; you just have to stand there and take the damage. So you have to stop them from showing up, and that means killing the ghosts as soon as possible. It's the ghosts that summon the snakes. No ghosts, no snakes. That's easier said than done (as I well know!), but using emerald swords can help matters a great deal; those are the best weapons against spooks.

ENTOMORPH: Some folks are a little bugged (heh) by not being able to do anything in the pyramid. At least, not without a certain coin. This is a tricky thing to find, but if you look carefully around the third rebel hideout, you may come across it. Just don't expect anyone there to roll out the carpet for you.

ULTIMA VII: SERPENT ISLE: Yep, the ULTIMAS remain popular, and so do the problems. In this case, it's getting the password to a certain gate up in Gwani land. This one is not easy. First, of course, you have to help the Gwanis. Then you have to remember you're looking for Batlin. Then you have to do something to get on his trail again. Finally, after all that, you need to find someone (not too far off) who will give you the password.

ANVIL OF DAWN: Some gamers are, so to speak, stuck on the heights. They've gone through Quagmire, climbed the mountain, and now discover they can't go any farther, at least not on their own. Reaching the evil stronghold across the way requires help, and if you think otherwise, you're just whistling in the dark.

RAVENLOFT: STONE PROPHET: Players at the end game are wondering what to do now that they have Anhktepot coming after them. Well, I don't suggest trying to fight him; that's a losing proposition. However, if you've reassembled the two seals and used them in the proper places (which you should do before waking the Big A), then all that's necessary is to play follow-the-leader and bring about the happy reunion.

And that's it for this look into the mailbag. Until next time, happy adventuring!

Reach Scorpia at:

- **AOL:** Scorpia's Lair (keyword: scorpia).
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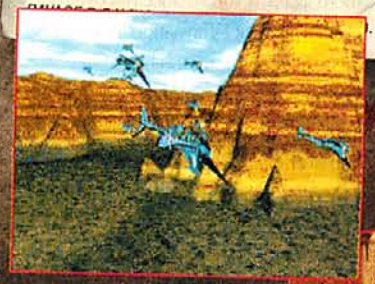
Dear Sis,

My D.C. vacation hasn't really turned out the way I planned. Seems as though the government screwed up some top secret project (NO surprise there). Anyhow, I've been recruited to lead a rebel force to patch things up. We're trying to wipe out a nasty species of space traveling vermin called the Necron who have infested all known dimensions (and probably a few we don't yet know about). So I guess you'd say the fate of the entire world rests on my shoulders... It should be one swell ride!

Give my love to that scrappy mutt, Ranger

John

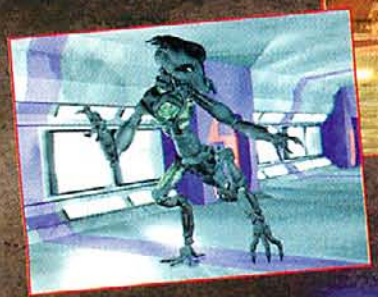
P.S. The cherry blossoms are in bloom and gosh they're pretty!



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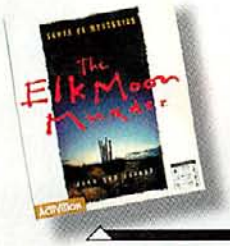
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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Shallow Grave

The Elk Moon Murder Looks Pretty, But Gameplay Is Left For Dead

by Jeff Green



Price: $29.95
System Requirements: IBM-compatible 486DX-66 or better processor, 8 MB RAM, 35 MB hard drive space, MS-DOS 6.22, Windows 3.1 or better, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, Sound Blaster 16-compatible sound card, mouse.
Macintosh requirements: 68040 66/33MHz processor, System 7.5.1.
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designers: Shannon Gilligan, Sam Egan
Publisher: Activision
Los Angeles, CA
(310) 473-9200
Reader Service #: 320

THE ELK MOON MURDER is the computer game equivalent of a beach-vacation mystery novel. It won't last long, you won't remember it a week later, but if you're completely willing to lower your standards and shift your brain into neutral, you might find it makes for a quick diversion. If that sounds like faint praise, it is. For while there's certainly room in the world for easy, lightweight computer games, ELK MOON is not nearly as good as it could be, even on this level, and it has enough problems that even newbie adventurers should probably think twice before laying down their cash.



SAY, IS THAT A NEWTON? Your main interface in the game, from which you'll perform all your detective work, is this personal digital assistant.

DEAD AND LOVING IT

Activision's two-CD interactive murder mystery is set in Santa Fe, New Mexico—almost Tony Hillerman country—and the story bears more than a passing resemblance to that mystery novelist's work (specifically *A Thief of Time*). Anna Elk Moon, a well-known Native American potter, has been shot dead in her studio. At the time of her death, she had been working on restoring a valuable, ancient pot—now missing—that was to be returned to the Santa Vera Pueblo after being kept for years in the private collection of a rich local art maven.

You are a rookie detective assigned to the case along with your partner, John Night Sky, and your boss is giving you just five days to find the killer before the FBI jumps in. Unfortunately, like a cheesy *Murder, She Wrote* plot, just about every character you meet seems to have had a reason to kill the victim. There's the desperate, shady real-estate developer who was publicly fighting with Anna over a proposed casino development on the pueblo. There's the former art dealer who was furious with Anna's decision to quit and who publicly threatened to destroy her. There's the art collector's nephew, who believed that the pot was rightfully his. There's her drunkard husband, her jealous lover, her jealous ex-husband, her husband's jealous ex-wife and her disgruntled former gardener. And, believe it or not, there's even more, but I have chosen to spare you the rest. You're welcome.

Gameplay is basically a matter of choosing suspects and informants to talk to from an overhead rendering of the town and then watching video clips of the interviews. Your primary interface is a Newton-like PDA, which lets you order and receive forensics reports and alibi verifications; review casefiles, evidence and notes; and receive barking voicemail commands from your boss. The acting throughout the game is surprisingly good, as is the dialog, which helps elevate the characters well above the level of caricature common to this genre. Along with the realistic sets and well-designed interface, ELK MOON, on a superficial level, has the aura of a first-class production. It's only when you actually try to play the thing—a minor detail, I know—that you realize just how superficial it is.

TIME OUT OF JOINT

Essentially, THE ELK MOON MURDER is an adventure game rail-shooter, guiding you along and only letting you talk to certain suspects at certain times—and once you've seen the two or three video clips recorded for that person, you can't talk to them again. If you've since discovered a crucial piece of information that contradicts their testimony, too bad.

Worse, the game is not smart about knowing when you've picked up information from one character that would affect your questioning of another. That is, the first time you talk to someone, you will always ask the exact same questions and get the same video responses, the second time you talk to them, you'll get the second round of canned questions and answers. What this means is that, depending on the order in which you talk to people, you're often going to know way more than you're going to be allowed to ask.

To give one small example, once I knew that Karen Gordon had spent the night with Ed Snyder, I went to talk to him. But because I was visiting him for the first time, I was watching Canned Video Sequence #1, and Karen's visit doesn't come up at all. We know he's lying, yet we don't confront him. This reliance on canned

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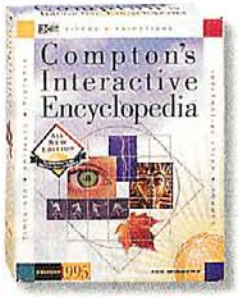
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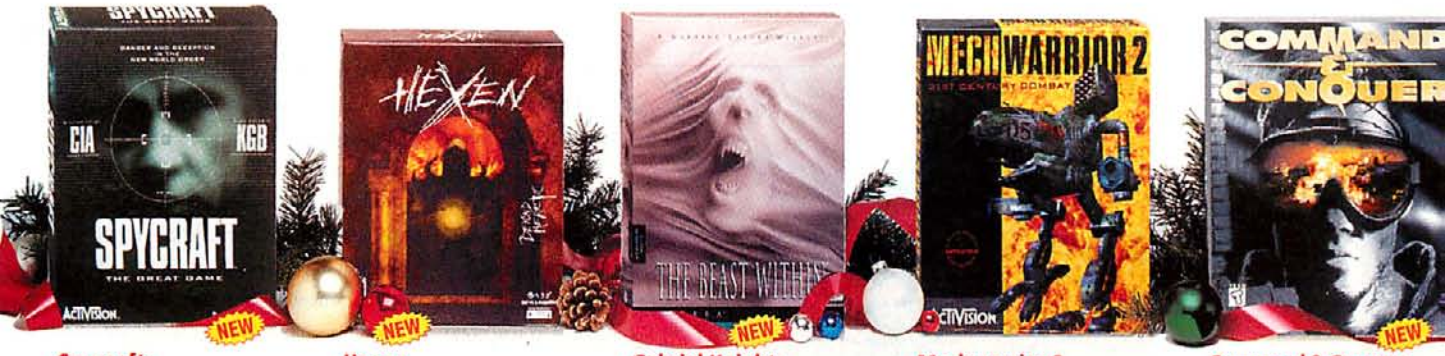
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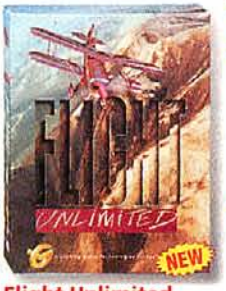
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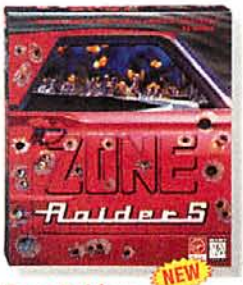
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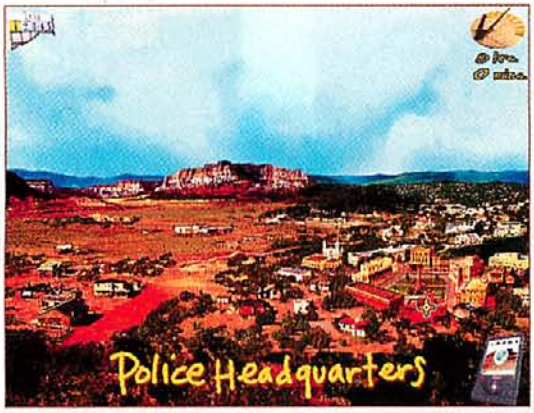
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GREETINGS FROM SANTA FE To navigate through the game, you pick locations from this overhead perspective of the town. Ain't it purty?

video also leads to numerous moments when time is completely out of joint. One time through the game, just for the heck of it, I didn't bother visiting one of the key suspects until the fourth day, but the first thing he said to me was that he'd "heard about [the murder] this morning." But he hadn't. He'd heard about it four days ago. This is just sloppy.

The five-day time scheme is, in fact, extremely annoying. Every question you ask, every action you take, is going to cost you at least 15 minutes. Because of this, and because of the ludicrous number of suspects and red herrings you have to wade through, you're going to quickly find yourself at the end of the game before you know it—like after just a few real-time hours of play. I suspect this was done to create the illusion of "replayability," but really, there isn't any. This is a game with just one correct answer; when you hit upon it, you're done for good. Making you play the game over and over just to hear all the clues is not the same thing.

What makes the time limit particularly obnoxious is that the time costs for your actions are completely unrealistic. At the crime scene, for example, you can take photographs of all the evidence in the room, but each photo eats up another 15 minutes. (Adding insult to injury is the fact that the photos aren't even worth taking, since they don't help you solve the crime at all). When you visit the local blabbermouths at the Mongoose Tavern, each person you talk to subtracts another 15 minutes, which is fine, except that the last guy doesn't say one word, he just smiles at you—and you still lose 15 minutes. This is done through the monitor, stuff

The low point of THE ELK MOON MURDER, though, comes when it's time to arrest a suspect. It's here you discover that the game is guilty of that hallmark of all bad mysteries: presenting you with information at the last second that you could not possibly have discovered on your own while playing the game.

When you arrest one of the plausible suspects, you are casually informed by your boss—as he escorts you to the exit screen—that she was on the phone at the time of the murder, a fact that is nowhere to be found in the course of the game. With another suspect, we are told that his alibi held up even though we have completely contrary information.

Two other "innocent" suspects, when you try to arrest them, will shoot you at point blank range—one kills you and the other puts you in the hospital. Another, at the moment of arrest, kills you by beaning you over the head with a shovel. Now, I ask you, if these people didn't commit the murder, why in the world are they attacking—murdering—a police officer? Is this what they do for fun in Santa Fe? No explanation is provided for their behavior, as, again, you are immediately escorted to the exit screen in each instance. (And, by the way, what kind of detective, other than Inspector Clouseau, would, when making an arrest with his partner, manage to get clobbered on the head with a shovel?) Granted, in all these cases you gave the wrong answer and therefore lost the game—but these are cheap and unsatisfying resolutions to all the red-herring stories. If I picked the wrong suspect, fine. Great. I lost. But how about showing me where I slipped up, rather than just hitting me on the head with a shovel? That's a game ending? Certainly the designers could have done better than that.



VIDEO KILLED THE COMPUTER GAME STAR Be prepared to watch lots of video in THE ELK MOON MURDER, because that's pretty much all you do in this game.

GOODNIGHT, MOON

When you do finally hit upon the right suspect, the denouement is quite good, and the myriad clues are tied up in a decent fashion. Unfortunately, by then, you may be too annoyed to care. It's too bad, really, because if the designers had just concentrated as much on the gameplay as they did on the rest of the title, they might have had something here. In any event, if you're still on the fence about whether to buy the game, think about this: For the $30 you'd spend, you could go to your local video store and rent *Vertigo*, *Rear Window*, *Touch of Evil*, *Chinatown*, *The Third Man* and five more mystery classics, for more than 20 hours of outstanding entertainment—at least twice as long as you'll be playing THE ELK MOON MURDER. And none of those movies will cheat you in the end.

APPEAL: Mystery fans and adventure game newbies looking for an evening or two's entertainment.

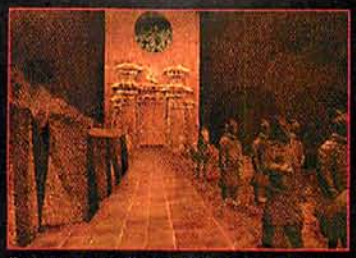
PROS: Decent mystery plot with good writing, acting and production values.

CONS: Limited gameplay coupled with extremely flawed time scheme will frustrate all but the most forgiving of gamers.

CG RATED



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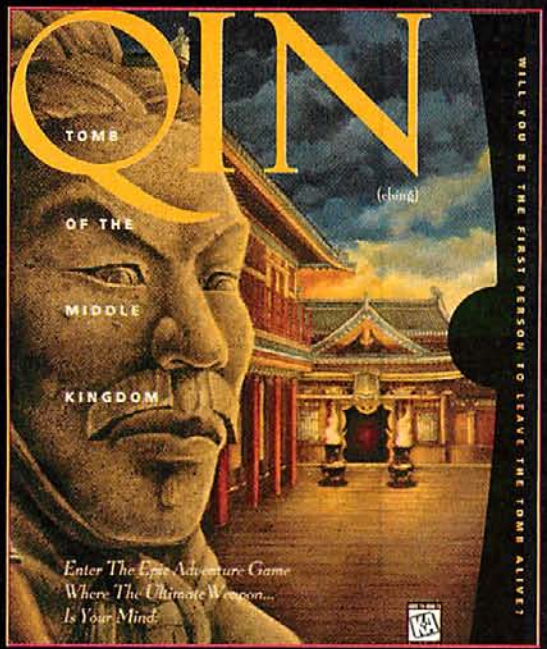
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—STEVEN GREENLEE, COMPUTER GAME REVIEW

QIN (CHING)

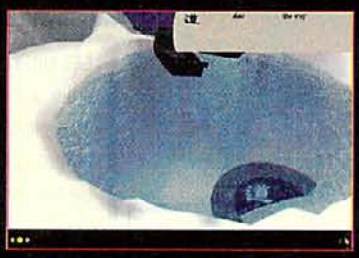
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Dance, Little Sister, Dance

Dis Philip Marlowe CD Don't Stink Up Da Joint

by Charles Ardai

The Little Sister was the first of Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe novels that I read, and what I remember most about the experience is being confused. I later grew to love Chandler, and Marlowe, and have since read all the Marlowe novels more than once, but that first time I was disappointed. So many characters to keep track of, so many relationships knit together in such a tangled web of deceit, so many archetypal scenes piling up in a kind of nightmare repetition...reading *The Little Sister* was hard work. It made my head hurt.



GET UP, YOU LOUSY BUM This old drunk was lying there "like an old Ford with a leaky head gasket." Forties-style animation and hardboiled prose help you get into the Chandler *ouevre*.

So, which of Chandler's seven novels does Byron Preiss select to turn into a computer game for Simon & Schuster? *The Big Sleep*, with its well-known characters and plot? *The Lady in the Lake*, with its single main setting and satisfying, inexorable denouement? Nope: *The Little Sister*, the hardest of them all to get into and get out of.

Since this is the same developer who gave us RAY BRADBURY'S THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES and Isaac Asimov's ROBOT CITY—turning these fine works into some of the weakest CD-ROM games around—you must forgive me for approaching PHILIP MARLOWE, PRIVATE EYE with some trepidation. But wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles, this time the Preiss is right.



CAPES & CARTRIDGES Hmm...this evidence seems to point equally to guns and comics. Real funny until somebody gets an ice pick in their skull.

FAREWELL, MY LOVELY

At first glance you may be forgiven a little trepidation as well: after some nifty 3D animation sets the scene, you will be startled to see the game's characters represented by flat, crude, almost ugly cartoon-like drawings. A gangster looks like his sneer was drawn on with a single swipe of a felt-tip pen. But then the characters start to move, and their movements are fluid and dimensional. They may be flat sketches, but they move as if they were real people. It's a little like the style of art used in the current *Adventures of Batman and Robin* TV series: deliberately artificial, evoking the style of authentic 1940s cartoons without that period's technical limitations. It takes only a few scenes to grow on you here.

Author Barbara Lanza has taken some liberties with Chandler's story, but players get to choose for themselves what degree of liberties they will tolerate. The first choice the game offers is between the novel's original plot and an alternate story line cooked up especially for the game. Either way, the first half of the story unfolds The same way: the honorable but hardboiled detective Marlowe gets a visit from mousy, nervous Orfamay Quest, and after some dickering, agrees to help her find her missing brother Orrin. Marlowe starts by digging around Orrin's last known address, a seedy Bay City flophouse, and two of the men he meets there shortly turn up dead with ice picks expertly inserted at the base of their skulls. Looking askance at

Important Clues

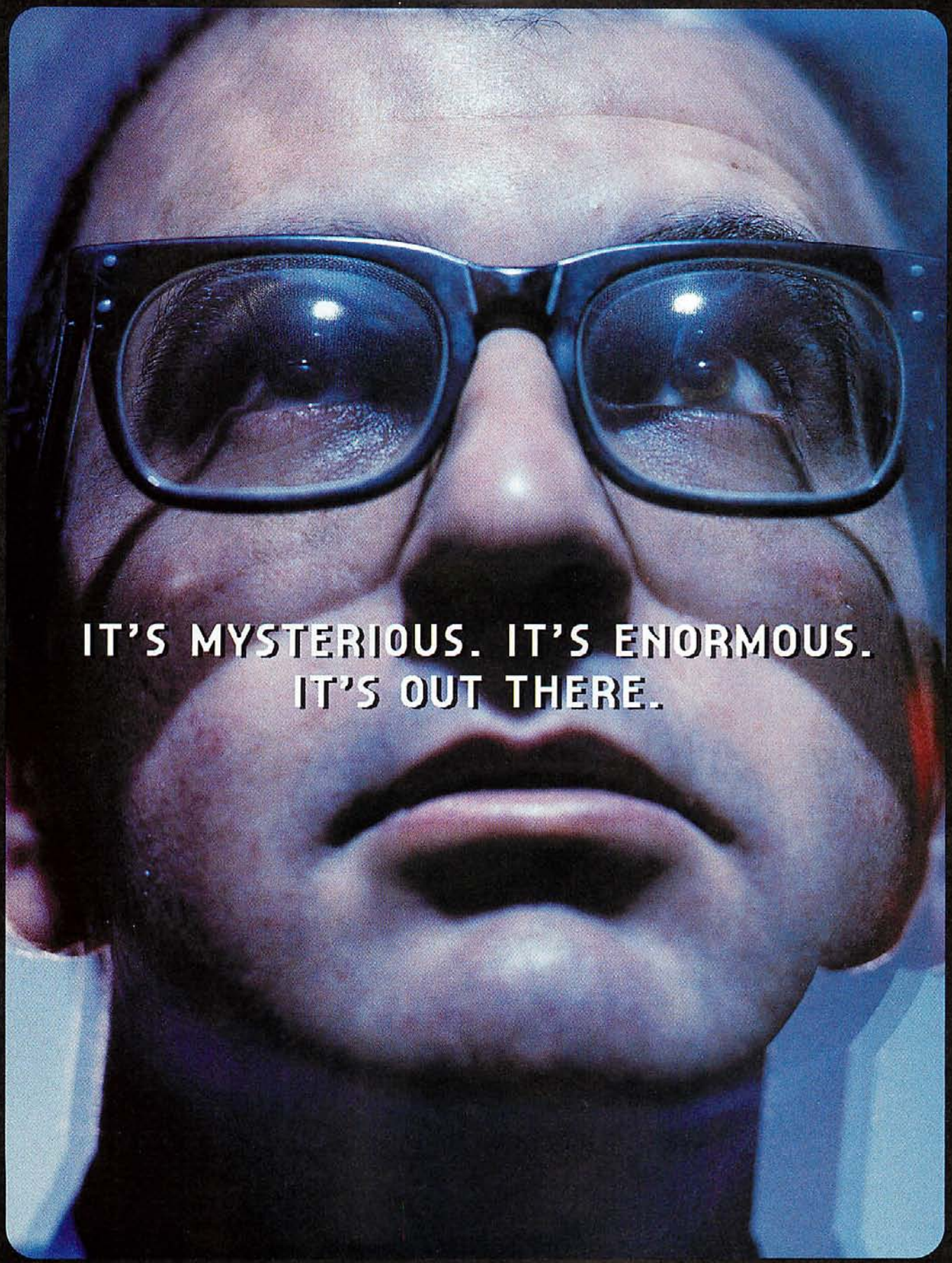
1. The man in the rooming house was bald when you met him, but has hair when you find him dead in the hotel. It's worth a look under his toupee.

2. Don't let the police sirens scare you out of an apartment you've broken into. You usually have time to scan one or two screens before they take you into the station, and even then they just hassle you.

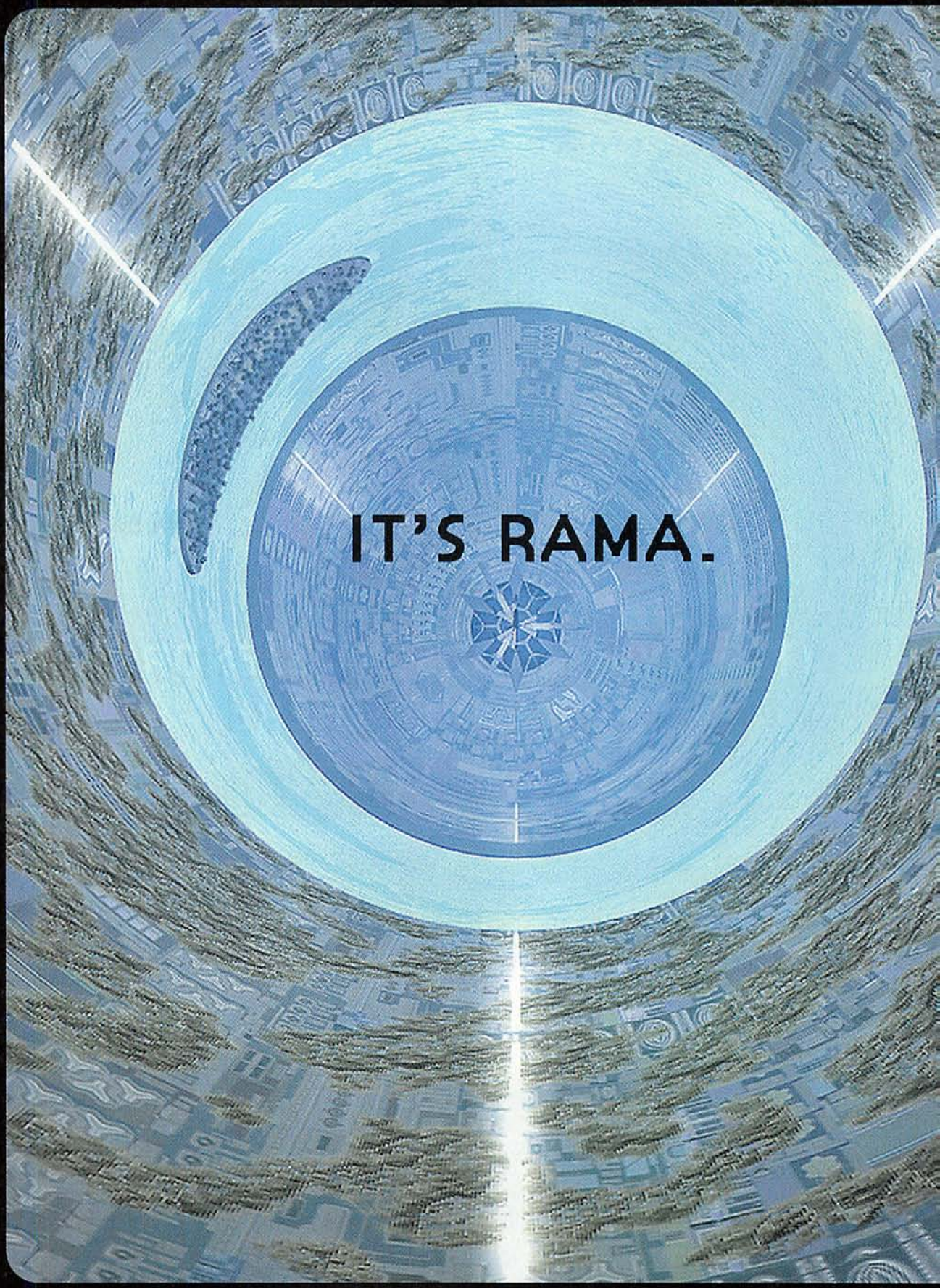
3. When you come to in the doctor's office with a dead body in front of you, though, get out as fast as you can. If the police catch you there, the game's over.



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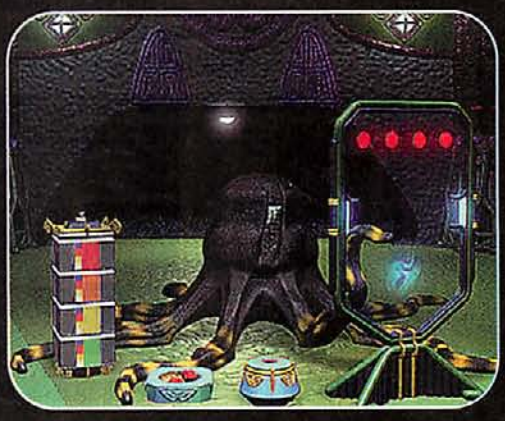
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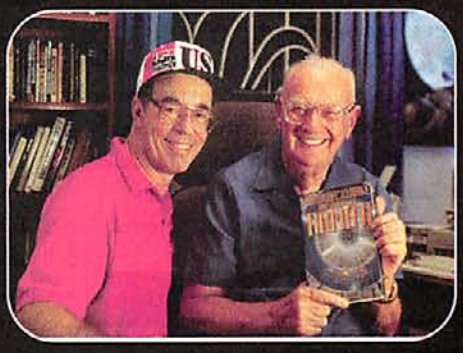
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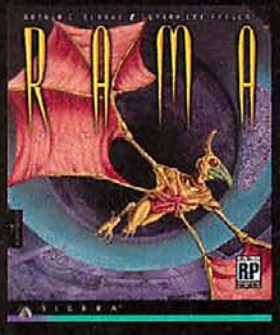


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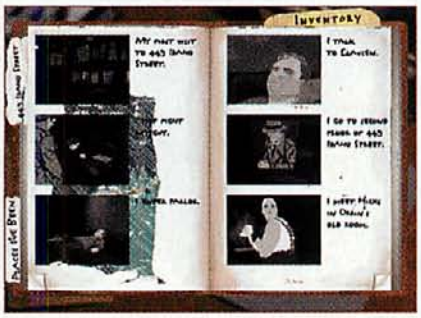
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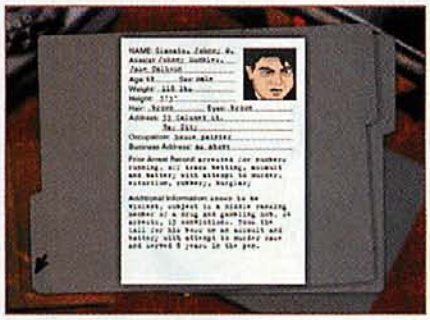
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Marlowe's fortuitous proximity to two homicides, the police start giving Marlowe their usual hard time. Meanwhile, anonymous phone calls start coming in at Marlowe's office. "This is a warning, Marlowe," they say. "Back off. Stop nosing around. Keep out of our business!"

Did I mention that Marlowe gets cold-cocked at one murder scene by a dame in dark glasses and knocked out at another by a shady doctor with an erotic letter opener and ready access to potassium hydrocyanide? Well, now I have. It's all part of the nightmare repetition I mentioned above. Chandler's readers grow accustomed to seeing the same scenes turn up again and again. Marlowe gets knocked out; Marlowe gets drugged; Marlowe gets a visit from two twitchy guys with guns.





LOTSA LEGWORK Bein' a P.I. ain't all fists and dames. Make sure to use the files on these goombas—and check back in your casebook. Enough lumps on the head, you might go into the big sleep and forget somethin'.

Marlowe also gets pushed around by the cops, gets warned off his case and visits refined-but-deadly mobsters at nightclubs. Finally, Marlowe cracks wise with hot dames and occasionally gets to lock lips with them as well. Only the names change from book to book.

It's all there in the game, too, even in the alternate plot line. What you might expect to be tiresome repetition, however, is actually welcome familiarity. Just as readers of Homer cherish each reference to "the wine-dark seas," readers of Chandler grow to cherish each cold-cocking and every laconic "There was nothing in that for me, so I let it pass."

Along with Chandler's scenes, Lanza lifts entire chunks of Chandler's prose verbatim, which is probably the smartest thing she could have done. Fake Chandler can't hold a candle to the real thing. And what you get here is usually the real thing, though a bowdlerized version: "a cheap bastard" becomes "a cheap bum," and a pair of stylish glasses is described as "slinky" but not as "cockeyed and oriental."

The repartee is delicious: The sluttish Dolores Gonzales is "as hard to get as a haircut"; tough movie star Mavis Weld is "so smart [she] could talk her way out of a safe deposit box." The actors' delivery is good, though Marlowe is a little too nasal and everyone sounds rushed. As long scenes of the oddly compelling animation play out before you, you surrender yourself to them, luxuriating in the decadence and charm of Chandler's world.

THE LONG GOODBYE

You may well ask, however, whether this is a cartoon or a game. Am I watching or am I playing? The answer is that mostly you are watching. The interactivity consists of choosing which scene to watch next by selecting locations from a map of California. When you travel to locations at which no character is present, you get to do some adventure game-style exploration, searching a room for clues before the cops pick you up for breaking and entering (not that the game ends if you're arrested; you're allowed to continue even after your license is revoked). When you run into other characters, you occasionally get to affect the direction a conversation takes by choosing between two alternatives: Do you ask Orfamay about Orrin or about the rest of her family? Do you wake the sleeping hotel manager gently or rudely?

This hardly qualifies as adventure gaming, though, and on the whole PHILIP MARLOWE, PRIVATE EYE delivers little for gamers to sink their teeth into. Still, for fans of the Marlowe novels, PRIVATE EYE is a treat, a teeth-rotting little bonbon they'll gobble up. You can keep your trigger finger from getting arthritic by playing QUAKE and your adventure game muscles limber on GABRIEL KNIGHT 2; the fact that PRIVATE EYE is light on game elements shouldn't keep lovers of hardboiled mysteries away from this pleasant and faithful adaptation. CG

APPEAL: Anyone who longs to hear Marlowe's timeless wisecracks spoken out loud to the accompaniment of saxophones and gunfire.

PROS: Authentic Chandler prose and plot twists, presented in a different and ultimately satisfying graphic style.

CONS: Not enough of a game–just a little light snooping and a tiny bit of interaction inserted into long scenes of conversation and action.

CG RATED

MarloweMania

Of the seven Marlowe novels, the first is the best starting point. Though its plot is baroque, *The Big Sleep* has some of the most memorable characters and by far the most staggering final punch to the reader's gut. *Playback*, Chandler's last novel, is extremely readable. *The Lady in the Lake* shares that virtue and also gives you a chance to see Marlowe operate in a setting other than his usual urban "mean streets." *The High Window* is as strong a novel as *The Little Sister* but also as hard to get into. *Farewell, My Lovely* is easier, but only if you can get past the casual racism with which Chandler peppers his prose. The masterpiece of the lot is *The Long Goodbye*, a sobering exploration of loyalty and betrayal; it's the one everyone should read.

Robert B. Parker, of Spenser For Hire fame, wrote two authorized Chandler sequels, *Poodle Springs* and *Perchance to Dream*. Neither is as good as the originals, but they are better-than-average pastiches. An even better modern heir to Chandler is Lawrence Block, whose novels about ex-cop Matt Scudder are the best hardboiled detective stories since the Marlowe books. For sheer suspense, start with *A Ticket To The Boneyard*; for a brilliant puzzle, try *A Stab In The Dark*; or for raw emotional power, read *Eight Million Ways To Die*.

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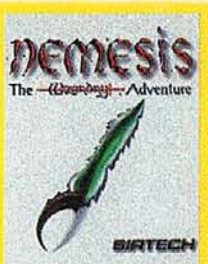
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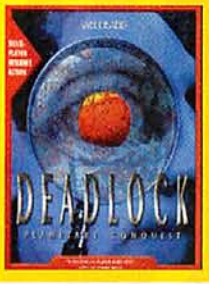
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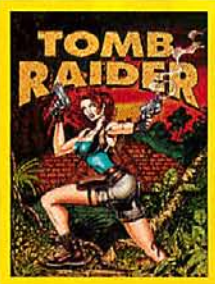
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"I'll Be Back"

The Terminator Returns In Bethesda's SkyNet, The Sequel To Future Shock



How quickly we forget: Before Quake, there was Future Shock. This *Terminator* spinoff was the first of the true 3D action games and the first game to make me feel sick to my stomach. Of course, it may have been forgotten in the excitement over Quake.

The follow-up, SkyNet, due in October, is set to bring Future Shock back up to speed with its competition. A first look at a late alpha version found the game, while still distinctly a work in progress, rich with potential.

Originally planned as a multiplayer patch for Future Shock, SkyNet has matured into an eight-mission standalone miniature with an add-on price (in the $20 to $30 range) and a raft of new features: SVGA graphics, a multiplayer mode and a range of lesser refinements.

And, naturally, a new story—built around SkyNet's plans for a city-busting nuclear missile left over from the last war and the human resistance's plans to thwart it. Once again, you're taking orders from John Connor and crew, and running the dusky gray-and-brown gauntlet of post-apocalypse LA on foot, in a jeep or in a hunter/killer aircraft.

But it's not *quite* the same. The levels in which Future Shock's 17 missions were carried out were often sprawling horizontal structures. SkyNet runs under an improved version of the Xngine—a step up from the one used for Daggerfall—that can throw around about 20 percent more polygons. One nice side effect is that the designers have been able to build more complex levels that use vertical space to much better effect.

An outstanding example is the third mission, in which, having found the missile and made your escape, you must locate the Cyberdyne building, make your way onto its roof from outside the structure, wind your way down through the building to activate the elevator, use it to reach an otherwise-inaccessible area to open a door in its cellar, explore said cellar and (pant, pant, pant) make your escape.

Problem is, now, the elevator's out of commission (another pant).

I don't see any big advances in AI; like Future Shock, SkyNet remains a "get them before they get you" shooter with objectives and the odd puzzle. The metalheads know you're out there and, like a baby going after mashed bananas, will make a beeline for you once you come within range. But now you'll know they're there as well. A second tap on the "I" key now replaces the weapon-of-lost-causes (the lead pipe) with a motion detector: a glimmering electronic semicircle imported from *Aliens*.

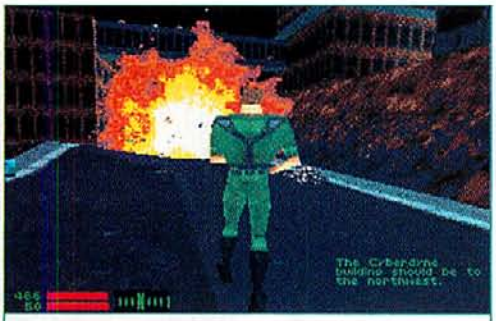


MECH MY DAY Some of the biggest enhancements for SkyNet are beautiful SVGA graphics, a more dimensional philosophy to level design, and meaner robots.

> "SkyNet, due in October, is set to bring Future Shock back up to speed with its competition."

INSIDE ACTION

- Accolade's getting into the 3D act with the dark and Doom-like Eradicator, a cyborg shooter that will allow you to select one of three characters. Raven is using the Cyclones II engine for the handsome Necrodome, a game of tank-based arena combat coded for Mindscape. However, Mindscape has silenced Silencers, an Abuse-esque side-view shooter
- Hellbender, Terminal Reality's follow-up to Fury 3 and Terminal Velocity, seems to be coming along nicely: A prerelease version of this Win 95–specific 3D shoot-'em-up offers lots of detailed scenery, voice narration from the get-go, and fluid flight. Oh, and you have full freedom of movement this time around, through dozens of 3D levels.



BIG BANG SkyNet will add multiplayer gaming to Future Shock, allowing you to blow up cohorts on foot or from jeeps and airplanes.

They've also taken Quake's explosion-at-the-butcher-shop approach to outrageous violence to the next logical level: comedy. In multiplayer mode, you can blow a rival's head right off its torso, leaving a little red-ringed stump of white vertebrae, and then shoot the head around, all while the poor owner is forced to watch from a tumbling point of view. (At press time, there was even some talk of allowing you to put the head through a basketball hoop.) In something of the same spirit, a missile's-eye view has also been incorporated, and it should be delightful to watch your opponents flee in terror at its passage.

And while I was playing an early version, which crashed if I looked at it funny, I also noticed that SkyNet is distinctly cleaner; irritating little problems in Future Shock, like the inability to properly target enemies at lower elevations, weren't present.

IS THE BEST YET TO COME?

I can't comment on some of the potentially most promising aspects of the game. I couldn't display the SVGA graphics (I'm told they're much crisper, and that distant objects look better), and the story animation wasn't in place. Bethesda is also trying to include levels of visual damage for certain in-game objects like walls and cars, but that hadn't been implemented yet either.

Nor had multivehicle play. In the original game, you couldn't switch between vehicles. In SkyNet's multiplayer mode, you will be able to—and a generous setup screen will allow you to configure the eight multiplayer levels in detail. That means you'll be able to hop in and out of jeeps and fighter planes to mow down your friends in deathmatch.

However, I was able to explore some of the multiplayer landscapes: the baked-brown hills with a huge, fallen-down HOLLYWOOD sign; a sewer with mucky-sounding footsteps and corridors built for ambush (with a death trap or two); and a nighttime desert rich in weapons and cover. I can already see the long-distance artillery battles unfolding: a sort of Scorched Earth 3D. Clearly, SkyNet will be worth another visit.

If I have any concerns based on this early look, it's that Bethesda is letting its creative eye stray a little too much toward the competition. SkyNet allows you to adopt a third-person view in multiplayer mode. (Duke Nukem 3D has an optional third-person view.) In SkyNet's multiplayer mode, you'll be able to destroy catwalks. (Gee, Duke has destructable catwalks.) One of the new weapons is a ricocheting pipe bomb. (Gee, Duke has those too.) See my point? A little of this borrowed design could be a good thing. A lot of it risks making the original look like a pretender, and in the year of games that are (or appear to be) true 3D, that's an important distinction. SkyNet needs to cut a swath of its own.

One thing I'd liked to have seen them borrow from Duke isn't in the offing: a built-in level editor. I'm told that Bethesda's in-house tools are too developer-oriented for general consumption. That's a good reason to tune them up—much as Bungie has tuned up the Forge design engine for inclusion with Marathon Infinity. I'd urge Bethesda to rethink its posture or at least make the data-file geometry available to enterprising shareware coders, as id has done with Doom. Editors have given the nearly three-year-old Doom a good extra two years of life, and there's no reason for Future Shock not to benefit from the same fountain of levels.

But, that said, there's more than enough new here to keep Future Shock veterans happy for weeks—and even to send them back into the original game with a fresh perspective, as SkyNet will also update FS with the new features.

In other words, SkyNet is still a patch. But it's also a full metal jacket, and a very hip and up-to-date one to boot, and I can't wait to try it on. I'll be back.

CG TIPS!

QUAKE'S SECRET NIGHTMARE LEVEL

If there's a problem with the shareware edition of Quake, it's that, even at the "hard" level, it's far too easy. But have you tried the Nightmare level? Did you even know there was one? (Maybe not—the entrance is hidden in a region you're unlikely to explore.)

Pick any of the difficulty-level halls. When you reappear in the episode-selection halls, take the corridor to the right—the one leading to the off-limits fourth episode—and drop into the pool at its end. Allow yourself to sink. Before you reach the bottom, swim to one of the three sides closest to the point where you dropped in. That way, when you fall through the pool's false bottom, you'll land on an overhead beam, rather than on the floor below. The exit on the left leads to the corridor that selects Nightmare.

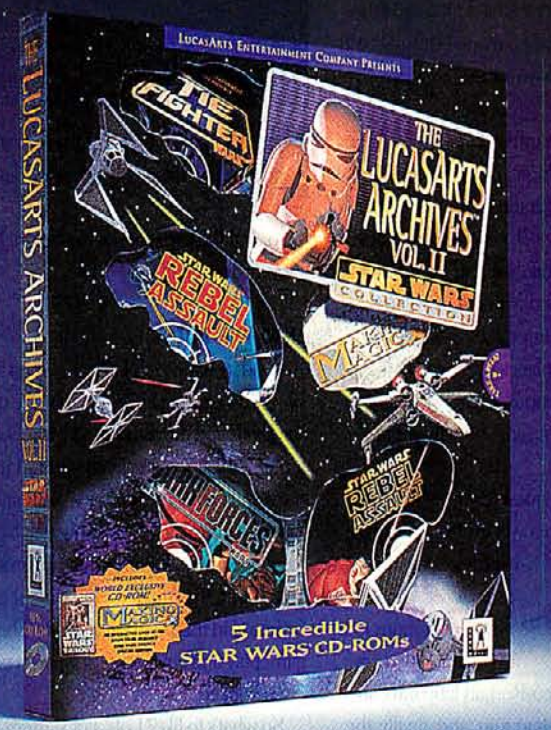


ENTER MY NIGHTMARE After you drop down from the pool onto the beam, enter this dark hallway to confront Quake's Nightmare level.

Once you exit the teleportation portal at the end of this corridor, you'll be taken back to the episode-selection hall, with the difficulty now ramped up to Nightmare level.

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She's A Beauty

TOMB RAIDER Dazzles With Beautiful Graphics And A Cool Heroine

by Peter Olafson



PRETTY The graphics in TOMB RAIDER will take your breath away. The textures on the polygons in this room look gorgeous, and this isn't even the 3D-accelerated version.

CG SNEAK PREVIEW
GAME STILL IN DEVELOPMENT

Imagine ALONE IN THE DARK removed to Indiana Jones turf, injected with a big hypo full of pretty, rugged texture maps, and reconfigured as an action game, and you'll have some sense of the splendor Core Design has achieved in Eidos Interactive's TOMB RAIDER. But while the English developers have borrowed ideas from diverse sources—a little ArtD, a bit of PRINCE OF PERSIA and the collected works of Harrison Ford—TOMB RAIDER, due in November, has a feel distinctly its own.

This third-person 3D action/adventure game—a huge hit with crowds and critics at last spring's E3 trade show—puts you in control of a sort of "Indiana Jane" character, one Lara Croft. She's an adventurer who's contracted with a shrewd businesswoman named Jacqueline Natla to find the three pieces of the ancient Scion, a mysterious artifact whose qualities, at this time, are about as nebulous as its name.



On her quest for the lost pieces, Lara will explore four huge worlds, each with three levels, drawn from civilizations lost to time: an Inca city, a Greco-Roman labyrinth, an Egyptian ruin, and, finally, the Pyramid of Atlantis. The twist in the story, though, is that Natla double-crosses Lara after she has recovered the first piece, so Lara must find the remaining two pieces for herself and face Natla's forces in Atlantis, where the conflict between villain and hero, and the mysteries of the Scion, finally come to a head.

INTO THE RUINS

I had a chance to play a pre-alpha version, with early incarnations of three of the levels and the museumlike training ground, the Gym, in which you can try out a wide array of moves without having to watch your back. (If you need to be persuaded of your character's Indiana Jane status, the Arc of the Covenant can be found in this mansion as well.) The gameplay and environment were so good I was hooked.

So what's to like? Lots. For starters, it's just nice having a woman in the driver's seat. Sure, it's been done before, typically by Sierra's Roberta Williams, but also typically without pushing women's roles beyond the conventions of literature and film (e.g., a princess, a girl detective, a dreamy blonde with a possessed hubby), and not in this sort of game. TOMB RAIDER could conceivably coax young women into a genre that's typically been exclusively a boy's club. And, to adopt the language of Core's wry synopsis, "psychologically, a male playing the game will be more involved with a woman character, in some macho protective little farty way."

Maybe. But Lara's a thoroughly modern, versatile young lady, even if she is made of textured polygons, and she can look after herself very nicely, thank you. She has a high, clear forehead, an enticing shade of lipstick, a mail-order hiker's outfit—including a bottomless little backpack with a rotating graphic inventory, which seems to hold everything the ancient regimes can throw at her. Lara's biggest asset, though, aside from her firearms, is her Olympic-gymnast constitution. And once the game's ramped up to SVGA, she becomes even more lifelike, her movements more supple and lithe.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

You can also tell Lara's been taking her vitamins, because her actions are almost superhuman. When she jumps straight up she almost touches the ceiling. She can also somersault in three cardinal

directions with barely a grunt of effort. When she swims underwater, she holds her breath as though escaping the *Poseidon*. When she pushes a great stone block, she puts her back into it. When she grabs the edge by her fingertips and pulls herself on top of it, it seems the most natural thing in the world. And when she does a backflip over a charging lion and then pumps it full of lead from behind, you get a true appreciation of Lara's power, and her beautifully animated movements.

Even at ease, she rocks gently, catching her breath, and no wonder. The places she's picked to explore would give Indy himself a workout: Deep, shadowed pools lead to gorgeous sunken ruins or to underwater dead-ends where the air runs out. (It's an unpleasant end, and the game brings its ravages home elegantly and simply.) Surfaces are almost never flat—the game is pockmarked with recesses, bumps and crevasses—and the rare flat wall flat is seldom unadorned. The incredible detail helps give these places a real presence and brings home their enormous size.

TEMPLES OF DOOM

Puzzles? Well, yes. There will be puzzles. But most were still under discussion, and the few nonenemy obstacles in the pre-alpha involved throwing an obscure switch to open a hidden door (with a helpful little cut scene showing the affected portal) or using Lara's athletic wherewithal to get out of rooms with no apparent exits.

And there will be traps—including old spikes-in-the-pit deals, pressure plates connected to fireball-spewing mechanisms and a certain famous rolling stone ball.

Despite all the great traps and puzzles, TOMB RAIDER is more about exploration and the art of self-preservation than anything else. It's a necessary skill, for Lara is not alone. Nature has reasserted itself in these abandoned places, and in our pre-alpha, Lara had barely stepped through the great double doors into the Inca city before a pack of wolves set upon her like, well, a pack of wolves: circling, jumping and biting. Down went her life bar. Around and around went this richly-animated pack.

Happily, you can avert such disaster, because Lara enters the game packing a pair of .45s which, once drawn (a tap on the spacebar), automatically and independently target nearby enemies. Naturally, there are better weapons—and first-aid kits—out there for the taking, including a pair of magnums, Uzis, a shotgun and grenades. You'll also find nastier beasts than mere wolves: lions, bears, giant rats, dinosaurs, the odd human being and man-eating plants—to name just a few of the game's inhabitants. When something great and gray sidled up beside Lara in a pool, I jumped as though I'd been burned. It was a croc. A *hungry* croc.

If you can put some distance, and lead, between yourself and your attackers, you'll leave them with their polygonal legs stiffly in the air, and so they'll stay for reference. If not—and "if not" happened a lot—Lara will keel over bloodlessly, and the wolves won't have to go to the store to pick up dinner. (The difficulty level of this entry level should be pared down for the release version.)

Much as I enjoyed all this, I do have a few wish-list items for the final take. The dynamic camera perspectives are indeed very cinematic, but need some work to mix better with gameplay. Typically, Lara is seen from behind. But I'd turn her around to face some new opponent, and find the game zooming in on that high forehead and not on the bat that was harassing her. Eidos knows some of the camera panning is a little odd, and they report that Core is still tweaking the camera angles.

I'd also like to see Lara react more to her surroundings—show an expression other than the waiting-for-the-elevator face she carries through the pre-alpha. She seemed a little, well, *dispassionate*, and perhaps that's why the macho-protective bond never wholly kicked in. (Acclaim's D is a useful reference point; it's perhaps the shortest computer game ever invented, but it gives you a reactive heroine you can love.)

Besides, Lara has no reason to be so diffident. She should be confident—she's got a great gig—and so should Eidos. TOMB RAIDER already looks fantastic, and as summer passes into fall, it can only get better. This treasure-hunting combination of great environment, great exploration and gun-toting action, can't come out soon enough.



GO FISH Lara's range of movements and the environments she'll explore are numerous; among the coolest of both are animations of her swimming in the game's many underground rivers and pools.



RUN AWAY Lara will face not only ravenous wolves, but also some of Natla's henchmen, such as "Mr. Lumberjack" here.

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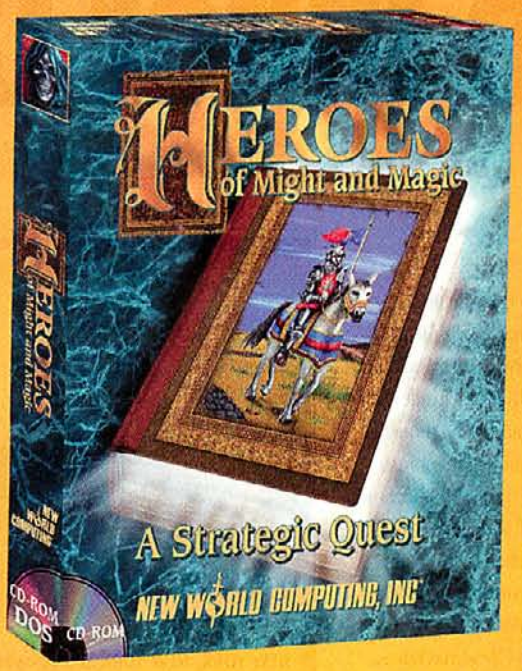
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The Inner City

Maxis' New Game Takes "Sims" To A Whole New Level

by Scott A. May

SNEAK PREVIEW
GAME STILL IN DEVELOPMENT

Every player, at one time or another, has no doubt fantasized about what it would be like to actually be inside their favorite game. The more realistic the game, the more tempting this notion becomes. Maxis will soon give SIMCITY fans a chance to live that dream—virtually, of course—in SIMCOPTER FOR WINDOWS 95.

Scheduled for pre-Christmas release, SIMCOPTER is an ambitious attempt to bring arcade-flavored action and third-person virtual reality to the familiar SIMCITY environment. Because many of the key features were not yet in place in the beta version previewed here, early evaluation relies more on concept than on actual gameplay. Yet, even in its rough form, the title looks promising, if not a little bizarre.

GOING DOWN?

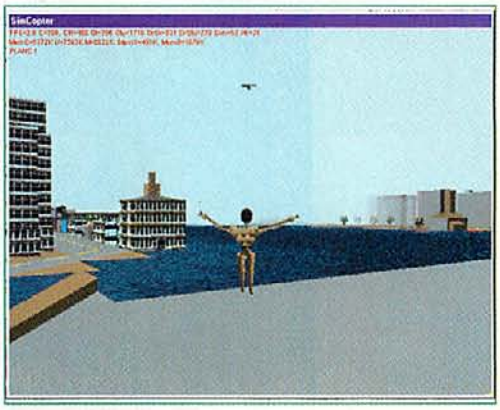
Given the long and prosperous history of Maxis's SIMCITY line, this type of game would seem the next logical step. In previous outings, players assumed a godlike position, overseeing all aspects of city government, urban renewal, civic concerns and disaster relief. This time, though, you drop down from the clouds, right into the heart of the action. Your tasks are now much more specific: dealing directly with emergencies in real time. In other words, your role is now service-oriented, rather than strictly administrative.



HANGAR ON—Before you start saving the city in SIMCOPTER, you'll start in the heliport, where you can purchase equipment upgrades and bigger, faster choppers.

Adhering to this hands-on approach, SIMCOPTER offers a more dynamic graphical view of your city. Traditionally, the SIMCITY environment was seen only from an overhead three-quarter perspective. Although you could zoom in on selected areas, a feeling of distance remained, which left you emotionally detached from the daily grind. SIMCOPTER bridges this gap, allowing you to not only fly in and around the 3D architecture but to actually land your vehicle and mingle with the masses. In effect, you become a SimCitizen.

Your role in the game is that of a helicopter pilot, working in conjunction with SimCity hospitals and police and fire departments. The heart of the game is a multimission career progressing through 10 levels of difficulty and 30 prebuilt cities. Each new city is larger and has more challenging landscapes, a greater population and more frequent emergencies. Survive all 10 levels and you'll face the ultimate challenge: Macropolis, a big, nasty crowded city of the future, guaranteed to tax your acquired skills.



NEW YORK, NEW YORK You can always get out of your bird and bask in the glow of your city while mingling with the natives. The skeletal pilot here will be fully rendered in the final version.

Points are earned for quick responses to—and successful resolutions of—a variety of emergencies. Use these credits to purchase chopper upgrades and specialized equipment thatmake your job easier. The final version will have nine types of vehicles available, modeled on real-life birds ranging from Bells to the latest Nortar copters. Though not a flight sim per se, each successive copter features reasonably accurate flight characteristics, such as speed, handling, passenger capacity and quality of add-on equipment.

AND THEY'RE OFF

Each mission begins at the main helicopter hanger, typically located on the outskirts of town. Once you're in the air, emergency calls immediately begin pouring in via radio dispatch. The dispatch operator's digitized voice is extremely authentic, imparting a real-time sense of urgency. Each call identifies the nature of the emergency, its geographical location and priority. As you progress in the game, these calls pour in more frequently, often one on top of another.

Therein lies much of the game's strategy—deciding which calls to respond to first, based on a number of different criteria: the magnitude of the emergency, potential for loss of life and distance from your present location. Action taken on low-priority situations may result in



Psychologists say inside every
18 to 35-year-old male, there lies
a potential psychotic killer.

docked points or complete mission failure. The further you get into the game, the more critical your split-second decisions become.

Cities are divided into nine sectors, and you have an on-screen map that lets you zoom in and out of the city. Because each city is extremely large and densely constructed, the map will also let you filter out certain information, making navigation easier while removing extraneous details that might cause confusion.

So what could possibly go wrong in your idyllic SimCities? Some dispatch calls involve crimes and include high-speed car chases and perpetrators fleeing on foot. In this case, your job is to locate the suspects, report their location to police, and attempt to track them with your high-powered searchlight. Once illuminated, the perps slow down, hopefully for long enough that nearby squad cars can make the collar.

Even more intense are riot situations. Here you must hover overhead and use your onboard loudspeaker to order the crowd to disperse. If that fails to break up the melee—which is likely—you can go one step further by launching tear gas into the crowd and using your spotlight and squawkbox to assist officers on the ground. According to Maxis, the "SimRioters" will be intelligent, in that they are motivated by real-life mob mentality, often resulting in unpredictable behavior.

Other dispatch calls are more disaster oriented: fires, plane crashes, automobile accidents, sinking boats. In some cases, you'll be the first on the scene and will have to radio for the appropriate support personnel (fire, police, ambulance). Often you'll be called on to assist officials who are already in place: rescuing victims, airlifting injured Sims to the nearest hospital with your fully-operational gurney and drenching fires with your water bucket. Depending on the size of the blaze or scale of the accident, upper levels of play often require that you simply dispatch help to the scene while you respond to higher-priority calls. The game is also designed such that even identical incidents are different from one mission to the next, based on the location where they occur.

TAKING IT TO THE STREETS

If you want to get even closer to the city, you can. SIMCOPTER allows you to land your bird on any flat surface—from rooftop to parking lot—exit the vehicle and explore the city on foot. Exactly what you will be able to do is unclear, although Maxis has hinted at some type of interaction with other pedestrians. In its present form, this option offers little more than fantasy fulfillment for those intrigued by the notion of viewing this virtual world from at ground level.

Graphics in the beta are mostly skeletal, but they provide a glimpse of the final version's 3D environment. The bulk of the game is polygon based, wrapped in detailed texture maps, with variable resolutions designed to maximize animation on slower machines. Multiple view modes are available, including a first-person cockpit display (with bitmapped overlay) and several chase and top-down views, which are handy for rescue missions. An onboard camera will also allow you to zoom in and out of the action below. Peripheral graphic effects include adjustable visibility (fog), lighting (day and night) and object texturing.

SIMCOPTER should appeal to the same gamers who enjoyed SIMCITY's multitasking challenges, but have long desired to experience first-hand the strategy and real-time action previously viewed from a more lofty position. If Maxis can actually pull off this immersive and visceral environment, then SIMCOPTER could be the beginning of a new era for the company's venerable SimSeries.

Importing Your Own Cities

The vast real estate encompassed by SIMCOPTER's 30 prebuilt cities provides nearly limitless variations of gameplay. Nothing, though, beats flying through a city of your very own creation. To satisfy every SIMCITY player's deep-seated desire to inhabit their dream creations, SIMCOPTER will allow you to fly missions in cities designed with SIMCITY 2000. Theoretically, this import feature will attract players from the previous version, while adding considerable life to both titles.

That may be the case, but the special strategic elements of this game will probably send SIMCITY 2000 owners back to the drawing board to create new urban terrain with SIMCOPTER's mission characteristics in mind.

For example, you could design areas with limited road access, which would place higher demands on your copter's ability to single-handedly extinguish fires or rescue trapped citizens. On the other hand, you could also make it easier to douse fires by including strategically placed rivers, lakes and reservoirs.



WE BUILT THIS CITY SIMCOPTER will allow players to import and then fly through the original cities they designed in Maxis's SIMCITY 2000.

In anticipation of riot situations, try designing urban areas with limited pedestrian access or special containment features. To increase the potential risks from fire—and to up your strategic ante—cluster high-rise apartments near petroleum refineries. Or you could create populated islands that prohibit access to ground emergency vehicles. Such hazardous possibilities are endless.

Of course, one of the biggest kicks is viewing your city's geographic details and architectural objects from SIMCOPTER's 3D perspective. Land in the middle of a football stadium and take a walking tour of the field. Or, after a busy day, you could simply land on a rural foothill and watch the chaos unfold below you. After all, you can't be everywhere at once, can you?

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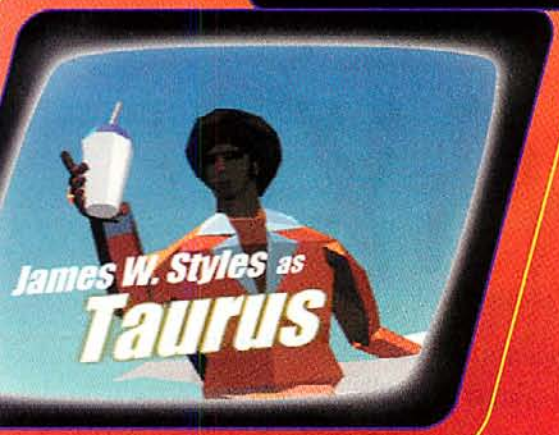
18 to [illegible] a potential psychotic killer.

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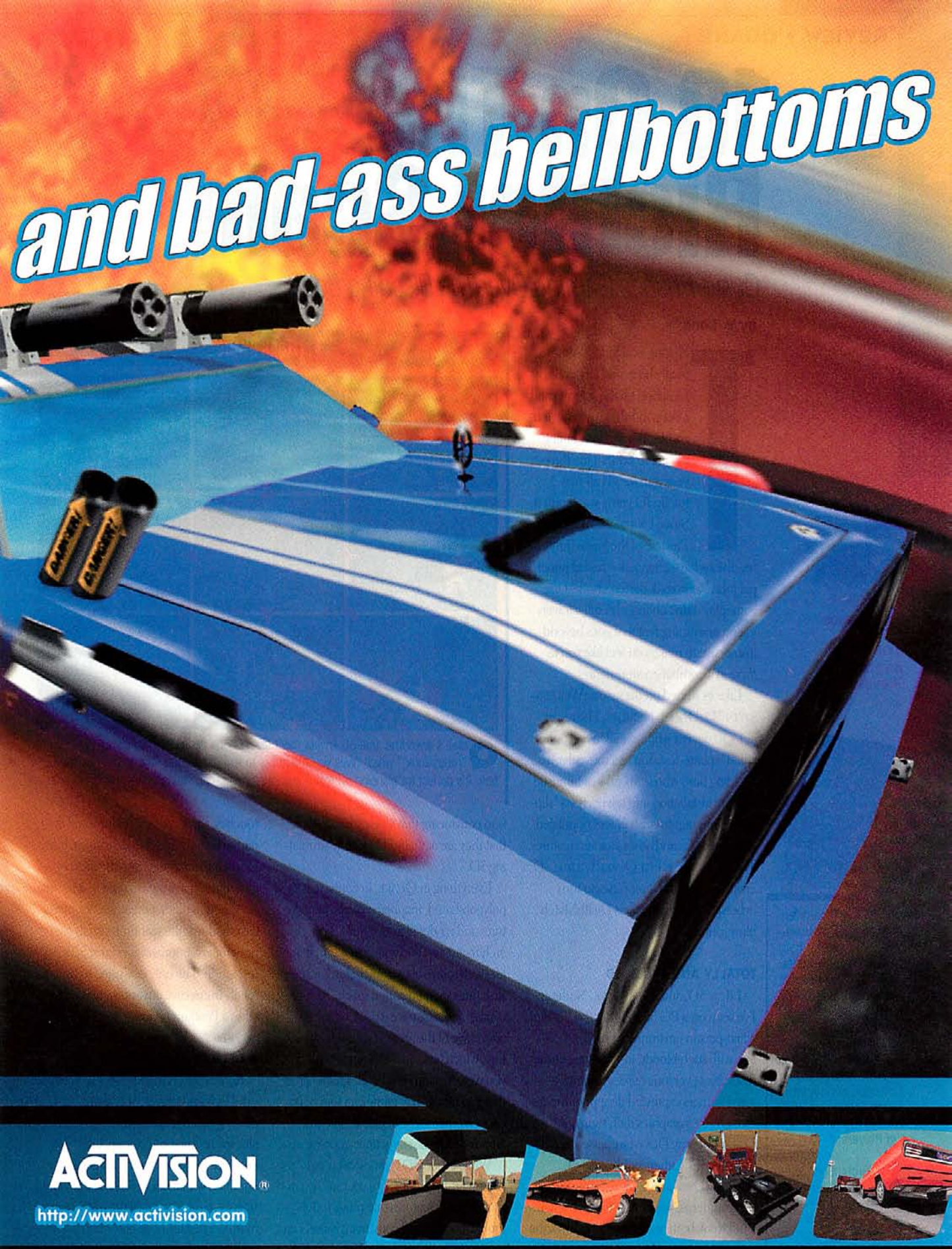






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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

CG CHOICE

10 On The Richter Scale

QUAKE Pushes Gaming Over The Bleeding Edge

by V. Long

CG ON-LINE

Download Quake version 1.01 shareware from www.zdnet.com/gaming



Price: $50 (shareware version can be downloaded free)
System Requirements: IBM-PC compatible Pentium 60; 8 MB RAM (16 MB for Windows 95); MS-DOS 5.0 or Windows 95; VGA graphics; CD-ROM drive; 80 MB free hard drive space (30 for shareware); supports Sound Blaster and GUS sound cards.
of Players: 1-16 (LAN or Internet)
Protection: None
Designer: id Software
Publisher: id Software
Mesquite, TX
1-800-idgames
Reader Service #: 319

The long-awaited QUAKE is finally here, and already it's a sensation on the Internet and a deep indulgence for action gamers everywhere. I think it's safe to say that the three-year wait for id's all-new, totally 3D game was worth it. Since I wrote CGW's Sneak Preview of the game (July), a few things have changed—and id principal John Romero departed id—but the gameplay didn't change. It's still a towering programming feat that goes beyond immersive to make you feel like you're *there* in a combat environment.

Like its storied predecessors (WOLFENSTEIN 3D, DOOM, HERETIC, HEXEN, et al.), QUAKE is a white-knuckle "kill or be killed" splatterfest. You're a muscular, ax-wielding hero who starts off in a futuristic military installation and teleports via "slipgates" into nightmarish places populated with monsters and other vicious creatures. The difference is that QUAKE is a true 3D environment, and it promises to turn cyberspace into a raucous DeathMatch playground.

TOTALLY AND TRULY 3D

Life is 3D, and so is QUAKE. Nothing I've seen on a PC beats QUAKE at creating a first-person environment on *flat* monitors with such bloody, in-your-face immediacy. Not everyone agrees with me—some gamers expressed disappointment that QUAKE's graphics didn't surpass DOOM the way DOOM surpassed WOLFENSTEIN 3D. Others point to DUKE NUKEM 3D as having more "innovative" environments, weapons and level design. But I think both arguments really miss the point: DOOM's and DUKE's illusion of 3D is so convincing that it's easy to overlook that they are actually 2D cleverly simulating 3D.

Everything in QUAKE, in contrast, is polygon-based, mapped with sinister textures and rendered in real-time. The architecture is constructed as it is in real life, with rooms above and below and structures spanning open space. To appreciate it, and to survive, you need to take advantage of the game's "mouselook" feature, which lets you slew your view as if you were turning your head. This is something no other "3D" game can touch: It deepens your sense of immersion and affords deadly-fast targeting accuracy.

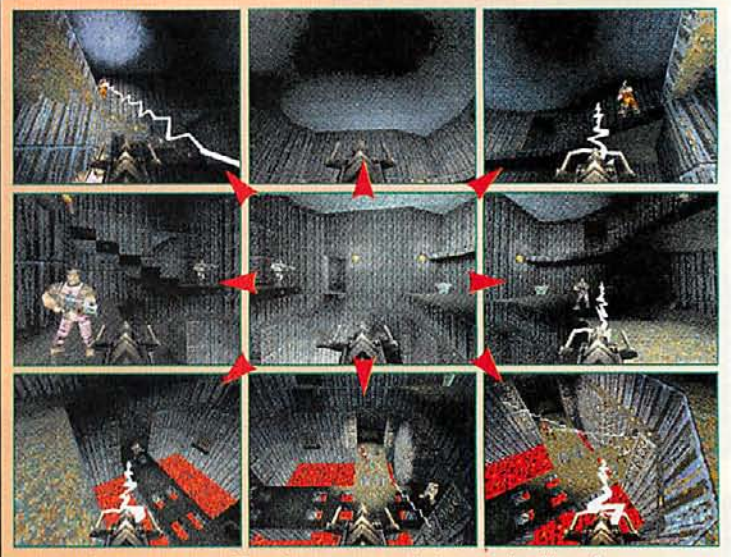
While other "3D" games still utilize cardboard-flat sprites, QUAKE puts you in the midst of creatures that move much more smoothly and convincingly and can be viewed from any angle. Various other touches, such as deep shadows and dynamic lighting effects, add realism. Fire a rocket into a passage, and the rocket's glow illuminates the corridor as it travels.

Although neither creatures nor players cast shadows, the real-time visuals are nonetheless impressive, even at 320x200 resolution. The only downside to the totally immersive environment is that it takes a Pentium 60 to run it.

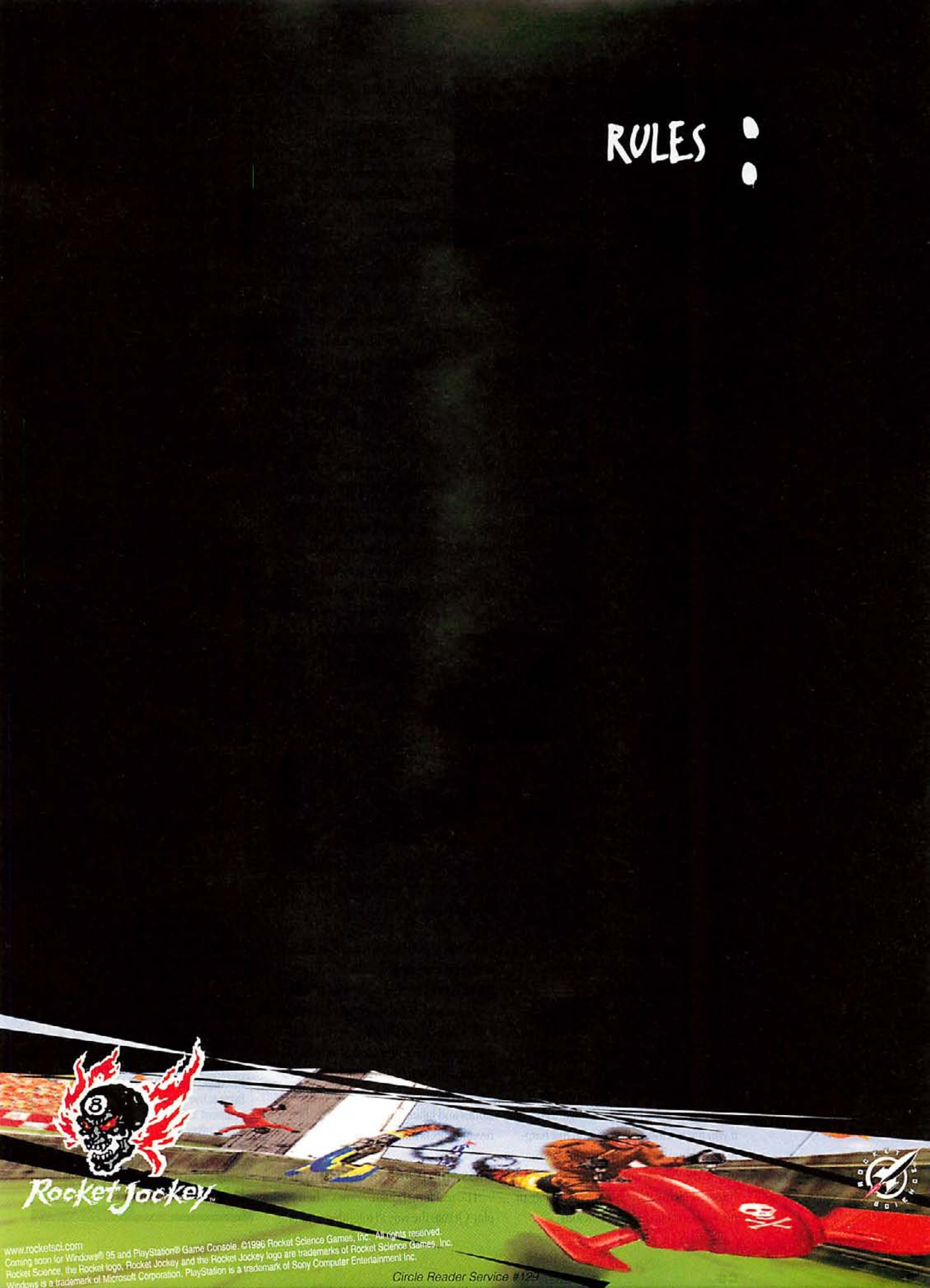
A DELICIOUS NIGHTMARE

Some gamers might go for DUKE's colorful look and irreverent attitude, but I prefer QUAKE's moody atmosphere. The gloomy textures and color palette enhance the spooky atmosphere and combine with the true 3D and scary monsters to make QUAKE all the more nightmarish. The lack of an auto-map feature adds to the impression of being there:

Freelook Or Die



QUAKE's awesome, true-3D environment can only be appreciated by using "mouselook," which gives you the ability to look fluidly and intuitively in any direction. It's perfect for glancing up and down, swimming, and hitting opponents on the run.


RULES !
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GROUP GORE QUAKE's crowning glory is the DeathMatch. With dynamic entry and Internet play, it's easy to get into; once you're in, you'll never want to stop.

Who has time to comprehend a 3D wireframe map while running for dear life? An inventory system might have been nice, but it would tend to distract me from the task of kicking ass.

The ambient sound effects, by Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor, such as the drip of water echoing from the subterranean sewers and the wind whistling through seemingly barren reaches, also add an Hitchcockian aura of suspense.

Unfortunately, QUAKE's landscape lacks interactivity—not even the biggest gun leaves a scratch. The stained glass doesn't shatter; buckshot doesn't leave pockmarks; even rocket blasts don't damage walls. In this case, at least, DUKE is ahead of QUAKE, but when the setting is so deceptively real and the experience so harrowing, you really don't have much time to play with your surroundings.

ENGINES OF DESTRUCTION

As in DOOM, the weapons are straightforward point-and-shooters, even if some, like the lightning-spewing Thunderbolt, are exhilirating to watch in action. Id added some twists to QUAKE's arsenal: With the grenade launcher, suicide is swift if you fire in close quarters, and discharging the Thunderbolt underwater is a sure way to die. My favorite plaything is the Super Nailgun, whose tremendous rate of fire makes nailing foes a delicious treat—though it eats ammo voraciously.

You'll need these nastier weapons to tackle QUAKE's ghoulish monster menagerie. The hulking Shambler and Buzzsaw Fiend, first introduced in the shareware, are joined by nastier kin. The Vore—a spider-legged harpie—has a homing attack that's hell to outrun and looks like a throwback to DOOM II. The Rotfish's dorsal fin cutting through the murky depths is a sure sign to get out of the water. The Spawn are painful to deal with no matter what, and the Death Knights, with their vicious blades, inflict lots of pain. If you're smart, you'll provoke the monsters into attacking each other. Some weapons won't even kill the big-boss monsters: Use your wits for the game's biggest, Shub-Niggurath.

The registered version provides 38 levels, including 9 from the shareware. The registered levels get much scarier and challenging, with traps, more monsters and great level design. Some, like the Wind Tunnel level, are designed to take you for a wild amusement park–like ride. Others are orchestrated to promote cardiac arrest. The Elder God Shrine level, for example, sends you fleeing through a darkened cemetery, bumping into headstones and falling into open graves, before revealing its brutal surprise.



THE UGLIEST ONE OF ALL You'll need your wits to defeat Shub-Niggurath, the big bad boss who makes the Shambler look cuddly.

MASS MIRTH AND GLOBAL MAYHEM

The real fun, though, comes when you play QUAKE the way id intended: hunting other like-minded gamers. Few things will put a bigger grin across your face than pouncing on an opponent while you're invisible thanks to the Ring of Shadows.

As in DOOM, players can engage in DeathMatches via direct cable, modem and IPX local area network connections. QUAKE ups the ante to 16 simultaneous players and adds options to choose colors and assign teams. Id went even further by integrating both dynamic entry, which allows players to join at any time, and TCP/IP connectivity, which permits play over the Internet. As a result, you can drop into any of the hundreds of 24-hour fragfests hosted by fans on the Internet. While some who dial into their ISPs for Internet DeathMatches grumble about lag, it's amazing that it works as well as it does. No other game provides this degree of multiplayer connectivity. With more multiplayer options, such as Capture the Flag, it could've been all the more outstanding.

Although it's not perfect, QUAKE excels at pure pulse-pounding action, and is more fun than I've ever had on a computer. It's the most immersive "visceral reality" experience out now. I'm not alone in thinking this: The overwhelming majority of my friends quickly succumbed to QUAKE's addictiveness, particularly after trying DeathMatch and mouselook. The fast-growing pool of playmates, servers and add-ons will ensure that QUAKE stays at the top of my playlist, and the playlists of thousands of other gamers, for a long time.

APPEAL: Fans of first-person action shooters seeking the next generation. Everyone else should at least see what the fuss is about.

PROS: Pure action shooter; cool 3D architecture and creatures; outstandingly moody atmosphere; multiplayer mayhem second to none.

CONS: Requires a muscular Pentium; the noninteractive environment is a letdown after DUKE NUKEM 3D. The soundtrack is lousy compared to DOOM's.

CG RATED



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Quake Aftershocks

Cheats, Hacks And Updates For Killer QUAKE Action

by V. Long

QUAKE is sure to be the hottest action game of the year, so it's only appropriate that we cover all the new hacks and happenings on the game for as long as it's hot. This month, we'll take a look at id's vision for Internet play with QuakeWorld, show you how to get connected to Internet DeathMatches, and offer cheat codes for any quivering little wusses who need them. Next month we'll talk about cool hacks for new weapons, levels and options. We'll also see if we can make the QUAKE C compiler easy to use.



WHAT SHAMBLER? You need fear no monsters in God mode; this Shambler is a weenie of a beast now. If you enjoy ultimate power, type Impulse 255 to swat him down like a fly.

CARMACK ENVISIONS QUAKEWORLD

John Carmack, id's lead programmer and chief technology officer, has been busy working on QuakeWorld, a pet project devoted exclusively to Internet play. Id plans to fully integrate QuakeWorld into QUAKE 2, but it should have custom executables available to implement some of QuakeWorld into the registered version of QUAKE.

During the R&D phase, id will run the master server, which tracks all QuakeWorld servers, users and frags. This will allow all QuakeWorld players and clans to be ranked on a global ladder, as well as help locate buddies on any QuakeWorld server. Id's American McGee has been developing a ranking system and researching methods used by the Chess Federation.

As part of the project, Carmack has been continually modifying QUAKE's network code to improve Internet play. Reduction in the size of the data packets transmitted has resulted in actual performance gains, while an increased flexibility in the way clients process "game states" has helped improve perceived performance.

As it was explained to me, the client will not need to wait for the server to respond to each request before processing the next move or action. This will allow for smoother play: It'll feel about 100 milliseconds faster than the actual "ping time" would suggest.

To compensate for Internet latency between server and client, the server will continuously synchronize with the client—think of the way a rubber band allows some stretch, but always tugs back. These corrections will generally be so seamless as to be unnoticeable, but the occasional "big one" may result in something like weapons fire erupting from nearby instead of from your gun barrel.

FRESH MEAT, QUICK 'N' EASY

For the time being, joining a game of QUAKE via the Internet is straightforward but time-consuming: you have to copy server IP addresses from Web sites and type that information into the game until you find a server with a decent response time. But if QUAKE uses Windows 95 to connect via the Internet, why not exploit the GUI and simplify the process down to a mere mouse-click or two?

That's where freeware and shareware utilities come in. Among the ones I've used are QUAKE Spy, by Joe Powell; Rift-QUAKE Internet Multiplayer Tool, by Bob Jamison; QUAKE Server Explorer, by Rick Ratayczak; and QUAKE Net, by Doug Berrett. Each has its advantages, but they generally do the same thing: poll a list of servers, prioritize them by ping (or response) times, wait for your selection, and then start QUAKE at the chosen IP address. Don't be surprised if one of these developers collaborates with id to create the user interface for the QuakeWorld.

QUAKE fanatic Vic Long wrote CGW's Sneak Preview of the game in our July issue. Though he is Technical Editor for Computer Life magazine, his idiom tends more towards "goopy streams of giblets," "frags" and "mass carnage."

Cheaters Only!

The shareware episode may have been a cakewalk, but the registered episodes will pummel even the toughest veteran. If fighting dirty doesn't bother you, try these cheats. Hit the ~ (tilde) key, and type them at the console.

GOD = God mode
FLY = Fly mode
NOCLIP = No-clipping mode
NOTARGET = Monsters don't see you (until you start shooting)
IMPULSE 9 = All weapons and ammo
IMPULSE -1 or **255** = Quad damage
IMPULSE 11 = Get a rune
MAP E#M# = Warp to episode # mission #
GIVE # = Get a weapon
GIVE S 200 = Get 200 shotgun shells
GIVE N 200 = Get 200 nails
GIVE R 200 = Get 200 rockets
GIVE C 200 = Get 200 cells
GIVE H 200 = Get 200 health

CGW ON-LINE

More information on QuakeWorld is available at the CGW Web site at **www.zdnet.com/gaming**.

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Round 2, Fight!

Four New Fighting Games Battle For The Crown, While Three Others Train For The Next Round

by Elliott Chin

Five years ago, a silent and powerful martial artist, master of the Shotokan school of karate, arrived on the shores of the United States, claiming to be the best fighter in the world. He was as good as his word, and more fighters, hearing of his prowess, made the journey to his fighting ground, hoping to challenge this disciplined master and take his mantle of World's Greatest Warrior.

That warrior five years ago was Ryu of Capcom's STREET FIGHTER II, the now-classic 2D fighting game that created the fighting game craze in the arcades. Not long after STREET FIGHTER II proved that there was a market for fighters, Midway's MORTAL KOMBAT hit the coin-op world, and turned a one-man show into a head-to-head brawl. Over the next two years, numerous fighting games came and went, including a dozen iterations of STREET FIGHTER II, three MORTAL KOMBATS and a slew of copycats. Then, in 1993, a new fighter, with a totally new style, stole the thunder from STREET FIGHTER II's punch: Sega's VIRTUA FIGHTER. This was the first 3D fighting game, and though it was still fought pretty much in 2D—left to right—the characters, arena and look of the game were all 3D. Since then, several companies have followed Sega's lead into 3D, enriching the battlefield, much to the delight of fighting fans everywhere.

While this revolution and one-upmanship was occurring in the arcades, computer gamers could only watch with envy the combatants duking it out for the favor of fighting fans. The PC couldn't equal the arcades, or even console machines, in graphics power and game controls, which meant that fighting games, which pushed both envelopes, couldn't be converted to the PC.

Happily, that's all changing. Today, with Pentium processors outmuscling the 32 bit chips on consoles, and with PC gamepads popping up left and right, the dawn of the PC fighting age has finally arrived. FX FIGHTER, and the MORTAL KOMBAT and STREET FIGHTER ports, were only the beginning. Now we've entered Round 2 of this tournament, and four new contenders have stepped into the ring.



And In This Corner...

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Rise 2: Resurrection 186
Xenophage: Alien Bloodsport 198

Fighters In Training

CG SNEAK PREVIEW
GAME STILL IN DEVELOPMENT

PERFECT WEAPON by ASC Games

PERFECT WEAPON isn't being designed as a head-to-head game, but rather a solo fighting game adventure. The story has you, as a special forces agent, suddenly spirited away to a strange world by an alien power. You must explore five worlds, battle alien foes and find your way back to Earth.

This game really stretches the definition of a fighting game, especially since half the game has you exploring your surroundings, picking up items for your inventory and moving from region to region. However, any time you encounter an enemy—and this happens often—the combat will take on all the aspects of a fighting game, only this time, you're fighting up to five enemies who coordinate their attacks to beat you into the alien ground. You have your lifebar, and your five foes have theirs. You also get to execute specific fighting moves, a la TEKKEN, and move around in what amounts to an enclosed arena (sometimes you're in a valley, other times you're in a dungeon, but you're still enclosed).

Die-hard fighting fans who just want to bash heads might be disappointed, but PERFECT WEAPON's combat



I'LL TAKE YOU BOTH ON PERFECT WEAPON is a fighting game-adventure hybrid, taking you through different worlds and thrusting you into vicious five-on-one 3D combat.

VIRTUA FIGHTER PC

This fighting game wins the roundup hands-down: It has the best graphics and the best gameplay by far. VIRTUA FIGHTER PC is actually a port of the successful VIRTUA FIGHTER REMIX, a game released a year ago for the Sega Saturn. VF REMIX was an update to the original VIRTUA FIGHTER, with gameplay tweaks and, more importantly, greatly enhanced graphics. VFPC, being a port of VF REMIX, has these same beautiful graphics, and in some cases looks even better than the Saturn version.

VFPC is definitely the best looking fighting game for the PC. The characters are composed of dozens of texture-mapped and shaded polygons, making them look like real bodies occupying space (as opposed to the characters in Mirage's RISE 2, which look like cardboard cutouts). Unlike the other fighters in this roundup, the characters in VFPC also move fluidly and realistically. When Akira elbows Lau in the back and the old man stumbles forward, you'd swear these are *people* fighting. And with the textures and graphics cranked to the maximum, the detail in VFPC is amazing: the creases in Akira's pants, Sarah's ponytail bobbing up and down, the ornate stitching on Pai's vest.

Aside from the stunning graphics, VIRTUA FIGHTER PC retains all the excellent gameplay of the arcade fighter: Each of the eight well-balanced characters has a unique and realistic fighting style, so there are differences, strengths and weaknesses to the fighters. VFPC also has a huge battery of special moves and multi-hit combos. VIRTUA FIGHTER pioneered two other innovations in this port: stomping attacks, a bone-crunching jump attack onto a prone fighter; and "ring-outs," victories you gain for ejecting an opponent from the arena rather than killing him.

Like the venerable STREET FIGHTER II series, VFPC has very deep gameplay. It is fairly easy to pick up, and the graphics, adjustable difficulty and well-documented special moves make VFPC immediately enjoyable. But as you play longer, VFPC rewards you with numerous combos, more-advanced special moves, ways to break combos, and other twists. This depth of gameplay is missing from all the other games in this roundup.

VFPC also has a variety of game options. The game can be run in low resolution, without shading or texturing and play perfectly. You can zoom the camera in and out or adjust the angle to see the fight from the side or back.



SLAM CITY VIRTUA FIGHTER PC is a perfect port of VF Remix, with excellent graphics, great gameplay and cool characters that dish out some painful attacks.

On the downside, VFPC lacks modem or direct-connect support. What is more irritating, is that VFPC is a port of the three-year-old VF REMIX and not VIRTUA FIGHTER 2, an even better game with more characters, more moves and more-mouth-watering graphics. Still, the fact is, VFPC is *the* best fighting game for the PC at this time. It's a great port of a great game, and while I'd rather play VF2, VIRTUA FIGHTER PC wins this tournament by a knockout.

APPEAL: Fans of arcade fighters and those wanting to experience the best fighting game on the PC.

PROS: Excellent graphics; excellent gameplay; well-balanced characters with distinct fighting styles.

CONS: A port of an older game; no modem or direct-connect capabilities.

CG RATED



Price: $49.95
System Requirements: IBM-compatible Pentium 90, 8 MB RAM, Windows 95, SVGA graphics, 60 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM drive; supports Sound Blaster-compatible sound cards and most gamepads.
of Players: 1–2
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: AM2
Publisher: Sega Entertainment
Redwood City, CA
(888) SEGASALES
Reader Service #: 320

BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN

As one of the few 3D fighting games on the PC, BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN definitely stands out from the crowd. Yet, it's a toss-up whether the nice panning 3D camera or the poorly ported graphics is what catches your eye first. Make no mistake: This is not your Playstation's TOSHINDEN; it's worse.

On the Playstation, TOSHINDEN had great 3D graphics and nicely textured and shaded polygon fighters. What was really ground-breaking in this game, though, was the 3D aspect. Not only did the game employ a panning camera that frequently moved in and out and showed different angles in 3D, but it was the first game to allow movement along the z-axis, albeit only in a limited fashion. You could dodge left or right and then attack from the new angle.



ALL THAT GLITTERS... The best thing about TOSHINDEN is its 3D movement and multiplayer options; other than that, it's a mediocre fighting game.

The PC port of TOSHINDEN isn't as graphically impressive as the Playstation version, and isn't as good a port as VIRTUA FIGHTER PC. TOSHINDEN has several graphics modes, from a low 240x120 resolution to a 640x480 hi-res mode. And you can turn shading, textures and backgrounds on or off. In hi-res mode with all the features turned on, TOSHINDEN actually looks pretty good and moves fairly quickly. But its graphics still aren't as detailed or clean as VFPC's, and definitely aren't as good as the Playstation version's. However, the nice 3D camera and 3D movement are still here, so the game's visually fluid and exciting.

Nothing in the graphics, though, could hide TOSHINDEN's mediocre gameplay. It's extremely straightforward, and your first hour with the game will be the same as your last. On the one hand, this is a plus, because TOSHINDEN is very responsive and easy to play (the special moves listed in the manual also help). However, beyond that, there are no tough combos to learn, no complicated special moves (except for one desperation move per character), no new ways to attack and defend. The characters also aren't very balanced or compelling. For example, given gamers of equal skill, Ellis (much faster than the other characters) will win nearly every match. In short: TOSHINDEN's gameplay isn't anywhere near as fun or rewarding as VFPC's.

What TOSHINDEN does best is multiplayer games: It supports direct connect, modem and network play, and only requires one CD for a two-player match.

On the PC, TOSHINDEN comes across as a beginner's game. Its graphics and 3D will draw gamers in, but the poor gameplay will leave them spoiling for a (better) fight.



Price: $49.99
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-66, 8 MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, VGA graphics, 5 MB hard drive space, DOS 5.0; supports Sound Blaster–compatible sound cards and most gamepads, Network IPX or NETBIOS, 9600 Baud modems and direct serial link.
of Players: 1–2
Protection: None (CD must be in drive except for multiplayer game)
Designer: Digital Dialect
Publisher: Playmates Interactive
La Mirada, CA
(301) 407-1490
Reader Service #: 321

APPEAL: Fans of the Playstation game or those wanting an easy introduction to fighting games.

PROS: Great multiplayer options and 3D camera and movement.

CONS: Shallow gameplay; characters aren't well balanced; graphics aren't up to Playstation or even VFPC standards.

CG RATED 2½

Fighters In Training

CG SNEAK PREVIEW
GAME STILL IN DEVELOPMENT

is fundamental, 3D fighting and should be a very nice diversion for action fans who want a little adventure with their fisticuffs. Look for this title to in late 1996 or early 1997.

IRON & BLOOD by Take 2 and Acclaim

Unlike PERFECT WEAPON, Take 2's IRON & BLOOD maintains the arena fighting style, but adds several twists in between bouts to bring something very new to the genre. IRON & BLOOD is set in the AD&D Ravenloft universe, so those familiar with *Dungeons & Dragons* will recognize the gargoyles and undead offered for play. There are 16 fighters in total to choose from, composed of beautiful texture-mapped and gouraud-shaded polygons. Each of the characters will have diffferent attacks depending on their race (armed undead might attack with magic swords, mages will attack with spells), and players will also be able to acquire artifacts during the game to complement their attacks. Your character will also gain levels as he progresses from bout to bout, and thus grow more powerful. You'll also be able to save your characters and load them up again for future play.



THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE IRON & BLOOD will certainly live up to its name; this AD&D fighting game will have a plethora of nasty beasts.

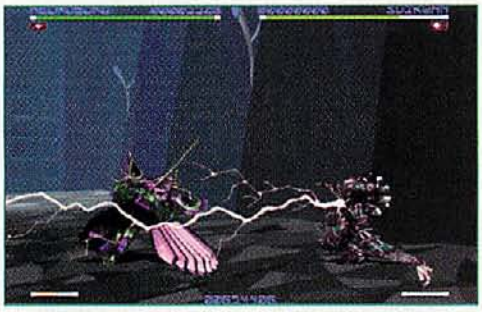
All these features and the dark and magical setting of AD&D Ravenloft will definitely draw gamers. And if the gameplay is as good as Take 2



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RISE 2: RESURRECTION

The original RISE OF THE ROBOTS was a stunning piece of SVGA artwork. Yet, for all the glitz, the gameplay was sorely lacking: few characters to choose from, moves that were hard to execute, very limited special moves, and an overall absence of depth. Taking heed of the criticisms, Mirage has returned with a sequel, RISE 2: RESURRECTION, that fixes some of the old problems but creates some new ones.



HARDWARE CRASH RISE 2 is better than RISE 1, but is still plagued by bad gameplay. Sure it looks nice, but it doesn't compare to the other fighters out there.

The graphics are still stunning in RISE 2, and the characters look crisp and detailed, right down to the metal wires snaking through their armor-plated skins. Nice details, such as electricity running over a robot's body as it gets hit and injured, also add to the visual appeal of the game. It also supports the Gravis GrIP, but doesn't have any modem or direct connect capabilities.

This time around, you have many robots to choose from: 18 are immediately selectable, and 4 more are hidden away, for a total of 22 characters. Yet many of the robots just seem to be clones of others and don't bring anything new to the game. In fact, the sheer number of characters makes solo play a pain, since you have to battle all 18 robots before you can face the supervisor. Most fighting games don't make you fight more than 8 or 10 characters before they throw the boss at you (even if they allow more than that in head-to-head play). Anything more gets tedious, especially when Robot 14 looks and acts suspiciously like Robot 1.

The robots in RISE 2 also have many new moves, including spectacular finishing moves, as in MORTAL KOMBAT, which is great. Unfortunately, Mirage doesn't tell you how to execute them. The manual lists a paltry two moves per character. I don't mind having to find some moves—that's part of the fun of a fighting game—but I would have liked to have been spotted a few more than two.

The special moves are still a bit difficult to time and execute. I would have appreciated more leeway with timing so I could execute more moves more often. Also, the game still seems shallow: what you see is what you get. Good fighting games, like VIRTUA FIGHTER, reward you for playing longer, with new combos, different ways to attack and different styles of fighting for each character.

RISE 2 doesn't seem like it has any secrets to reveal, and even if it did, with the tedious solo play, the difficult action and the hidden moves, you probably wouldn't want to hang around to find out.



Price: $49.99
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-33, 4MB RAM (8 MB for SVGA mode), VGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive, 3 MB hard drive space, DOS 5.0 or Windows 95; supports Gravis GrIP and most major sound cards.
of Players: 1–2
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Mirage Studios
Publisher: Acclaim
Glen Gove, NY
(516) 656-5000
Reader Service #: 322

APPEAL: Fans of the original RISE OF THE ROBOTS; those looking for a pretty fighting game.

PROS: Nice SVGA graphics; lots of characters to choose from; a free CD carrying case.

CONS: Too many characters to fight in solo play; gameplay is shallow; moves are hard to execute; most special moves are left unmentioned.

CG RATED

Fighters In Training

CG SNEAK PREVIEW
GAME STILL IN DEVELOPMENT

claims, we could have a sleeper fighting hit on our hands. Acclaim hopes to have IRON & BLOOD ready by the end of the year.

DIE BY THE SWORD by Interplay

Interplay is also venturing into the medieval realms with DIE BY THE SWORD, a fighting game with a plethora of fantastic creatures—knights, kobolds, goblins and ogres—all wielding ancient weapons in hand-to-hand melees in enormous arenas.

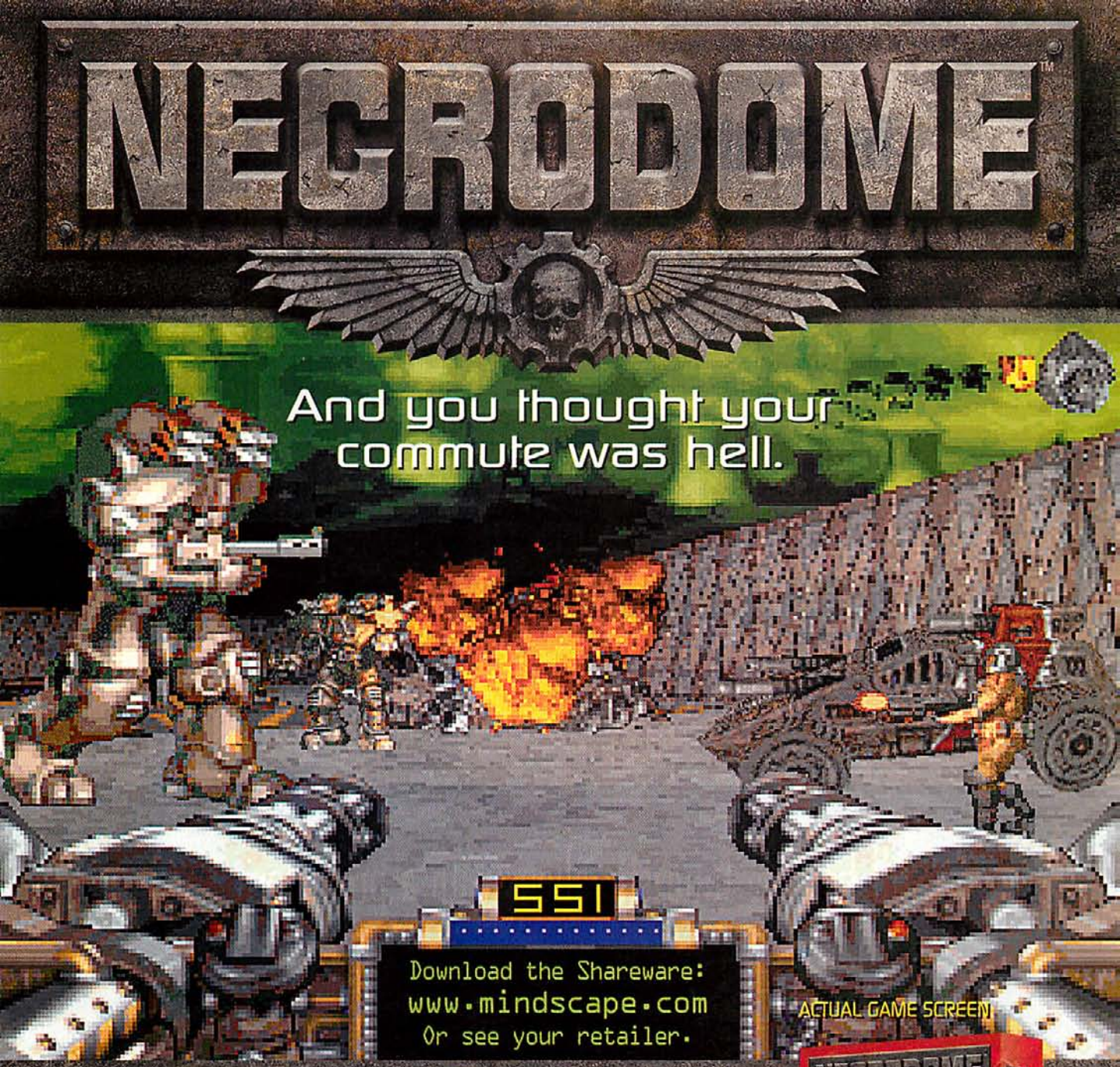
DBTS is a 3D polygon fighter, but its 3D movement is much more fluid than TOSHINDEN's. It will take some getting used to, but you really can fight in all three dimensions in this game. It won't come with that many special moves, as Interplay expects gamers to create their own. Basically, the game will allow you to construct your own moves (such as a forward rush followed by a trip attack and then an uppercut) by stringing together a few keys and then saving this configuration. When you enter battle, you can simply press that key, and your combo or special move will be executed.



YOU'RE UGLY All the gruesome beasts and noble warriors of DIE BY THE SWORD will fight in real 3D.

The arenas are truly huge, and you sometimes fight in rolling hills or castles that cover several screens. As in PERFECT WEAPON, you sometimes take on more than one opponent at once (kobolds come by the dozen). DIE BY THE SWORD should be out in early 1997.

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In Control

Fighting games simply cannot be played on a keyboard, at least, not well. To truly get the feel of an arcade fighter, you need to play the game with a gamepad. Short of the arcade fighting joystick, nothing feels as good as a nice meaty gamepad in your grip. Here are three that you can find, or will soon find, on the store shelves. No gamepad is good, though, unless the fighting game you're playing supports it. Check with the game or gamepad manufacturer for compatibility before you try it.



GRAVIS GRIP

The GrIP is an excellent gamepad; it looks and feels like Sega's Japanese Saturn pad. It fits nicely into your hands, though may be a bit small for gamers with large mitts. The six right-side buttons and the left-right buttons on top are perfectly placed, and the sticky direction pad in particular is nice (it has small indents for the diagonal directions, making diagonal movement easier). Best of all, you can plug up to four gamepads into a GrIP multiport, which plugs into the joystick port in your sound card. The GrIP Fighting Machine package is ideal for fighting games since it includes two gamepads (and a bundled game).

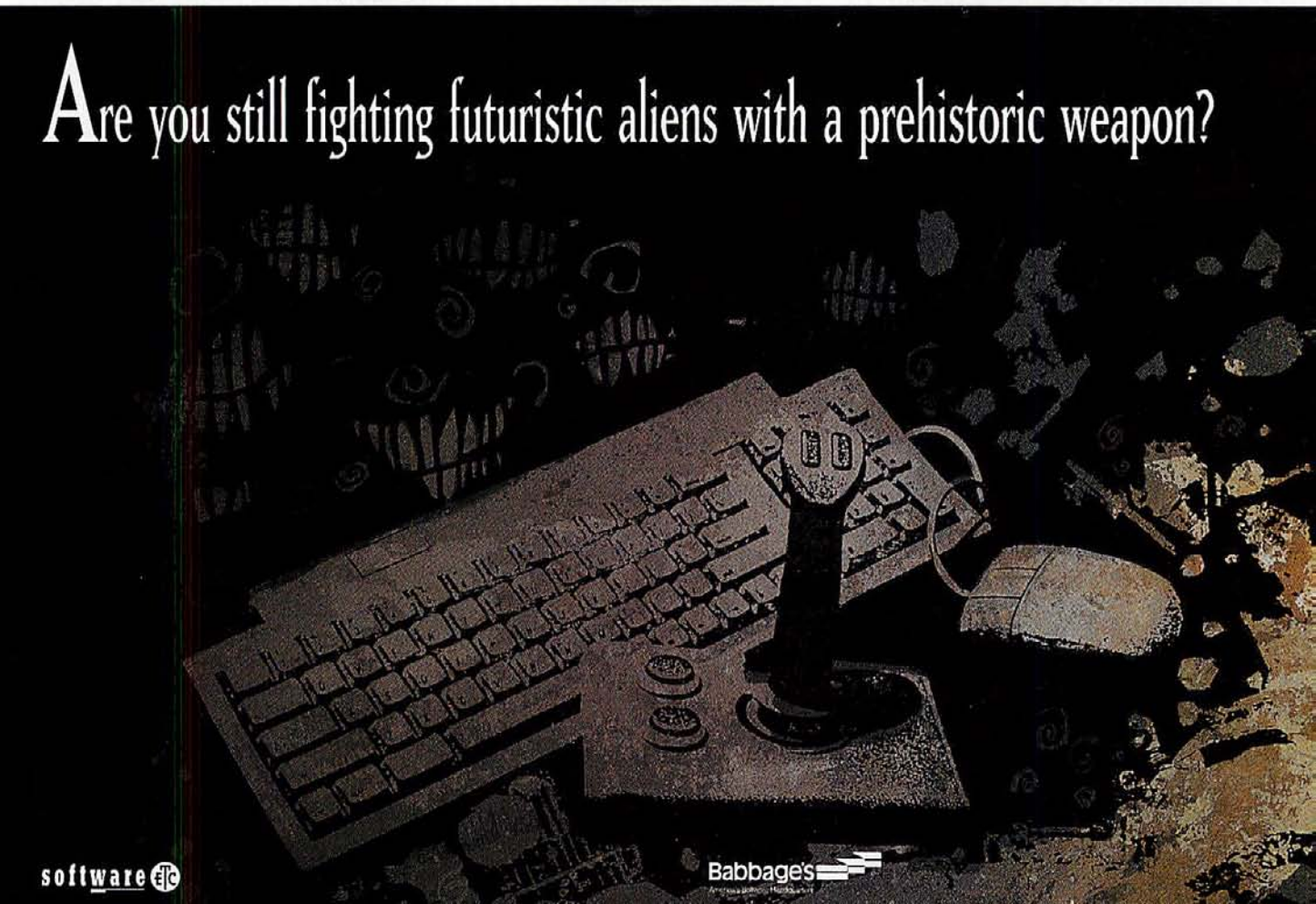
Grade: A

MICROSOFT SIDEWINDER GAMEPAD

The Sidewinder Gamepad looks like a Playstation/Nintendo 64 gamepad hybrid, with two sticks like the Playstation pad for a firm grip. The 11 buttons are all easy to reach, and the direction pad is

Gamepad	Company	Price	Phone Number
GrIP	Gravis	$119.95	(800) 663-8558
Sidewinder	Microsoft	$ 39.00	(800) 426-9400
Blaster Pad	Creative Labs	$ 29.95	(800) 998-1000

Are you still fighting futuristic aliens with a prehistoric weapon?



software etc

Babbage's

nice; like the GrIP, it has indents for the diagonal directions. This gamepad has the most comfortable grip of this lot. However, when trying circular movements, such as one fluid motion from down to down/forward to forward, the rising cardinal bump on the pad sometimes gets in the way. A great feature, though, is that you can daisy-chain up to four Sidewinder gamepads via a port at the back of the gamepad. This worked perfectly for VIRTUA FIGHTER PC, with one gamepad connected to the computer and another gamepad connected to the first. Both responded fine and felt very comfortable. The Sidewinder gamepad will be out in late October. **Grade: A–**





CREATIVE LABS BLASTER GAMEPAD

The Blaster Gamepad is also a nice gamepad and has a switch so it can function as either a gamepad or joystick. As a fighting gamepad, it's not bad, though its design isn't as comforting as the GrIP's or Sidewinder's. Still, it has a load of programmable buttons (six on the right, a select-and-start button in front, and two left-right buttons on top). It might be a bit big for smaller hands, but nevertheless functions quite nicely. One plus is that it supports BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN, a game that needs all those buttons. **Grade: B**

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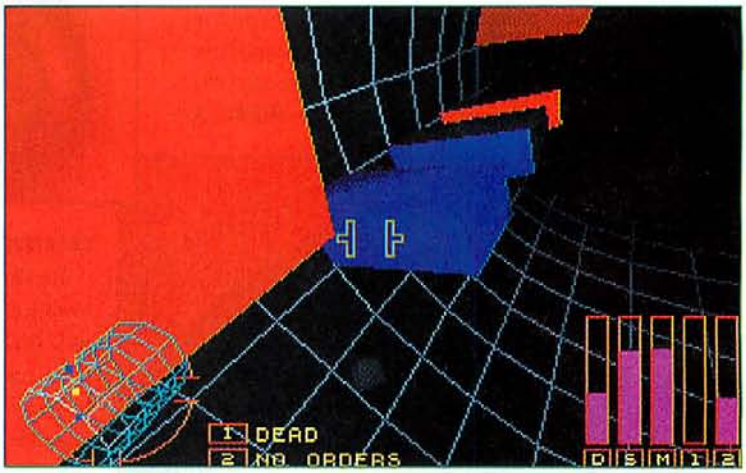
DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Lost In Space

Goldtree's Sci-Fi Shooting Gallery Races Toward Oblivion

by Mark Clarkson

The trend in today's 3D action shooters is to combine sexy graphics and hi-fi CD sound with mediocre gameplay, but CYLINDRIX is bucking this trend by making the entire game—gameplay, sound and graphics—mediocre. CYLINDRIX, a first-person shooter with a science-fiction theme, has a typical story: You're just chillin' in front of the TV when a god-like being from the stars whisks you into outer space where you're forced to battle other beings, slaves like yourself, inside giant orbiting cylinders. Win your way through to the end, and this Power just might return you to your couch in time for the *X-Files*.



STUMBLING BLOCKS CYLINDRIX has some interesting features, like commandable wingmen, but the flat-colored polygons and dated graphics aren't very compelling.

SHOOT 'EM DOWN

The combat in CYLINDRIX at least isn't fisticuffs; it's all done from fighter ships that can zip along the ground, clinging to the inner surface of the cylinder, or take to the air. Each ship has three weapons: lasers, missiles and a special weapon such as the ability to cloak itself or repel enemy missiles. The rules are simple: Use the radar on your HUD to seek out the enemy and destroy him. You even have a couple of wingmen along to help. You can give them simple orders like Attack, Capture Pylons, or Defend Base, and they'll carry them out, unattended.

Besides the battling ships, cylinder furnishings are limited to some pylons, two bases and an energy square. Run into the pylons and they assume your team color. The more pylons your team possesses, the more power is available to your weapons. If the enemy takes out your base, you lose your radar and weapons targeting, making it very hard to find the bad guys or destroy them once you do. If your shields are depleted from enemy fire, the energy square will replenish them.

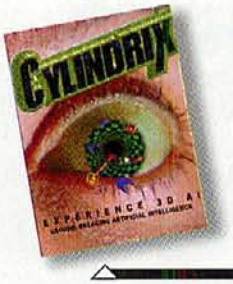
There are 10 cylindrical arenas, each orbiting the home world of a different race. The cylinders' interiors, although the same in dimension, are furnished, decorated and lit differently. The physics governing your ship's movement—acceleration, speed, etc.—change from cylinder to cylinder, as do the opponents you'll face. Each race displays different characteristics in a fight, but once past the team-oriented Sentries and the pensive Bok, the role of your opponents is a litany of anger.

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

CYLINDRIX's graphics are very, very basic. The pylons are boxes. The ships are wedges, or boxes, or boxes with wedges stuck onto them. Explosions are spheres, which shatter into large triangles. The cylinder's inner surface is a grid. The colors look like they're limited to a paltry four or five shades, and the sound is even less appealing. The computer's voice has been altered to make it seem more machine-like, but in the process, it's been blurred into near-total incomprehensibility. Most damning, I found the ships pretty hard to control, especially in flying mode; they handle more like blimps than fighters.

I experienced weird video problems running the game under Windows 95, but it ran flawlessly in DOS. That's good, because the technical documentation in the README file is peppered not with helpful advice but with annoyingly flippant jokes.

CYLINDRIX does have IPX network and modem play, which is a saving grace for almost any game. But even head-to-head, I just didn't find the game much fun to play.



Price: $29 (mail-order or Internet)
System Requirements: IBM-compatible 486-66, 8 MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM Drive, 10 MB hard drive space, VGA graphics; supports Sound Blaster-compatible sound cards
of Players: 1-6
Protection: None
Designer: Hot Warez
Publisher: Goldtree Enterprises
Metairie, LA
(800) 746-3772
Reader Service #: 324

APPEAL: Fans of fast-paced, first-person action games who're looking for a little strategy on the side.

PROS: Some additions to the standard shoot-'em-up fare, including pylons to capture and wingmen to command.

CONS: Circa-1990 graphics, fuzzy sound, and once you've seen one cylinder, you've seen 'em all.

CG RATED

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XENOPHAGE

Alien Bloodsport

FormGen INCORPORATED

Developed by Argo Games
Published by Apogee Software, Ltd.
Distributed by FormGen

ARGO GAMES

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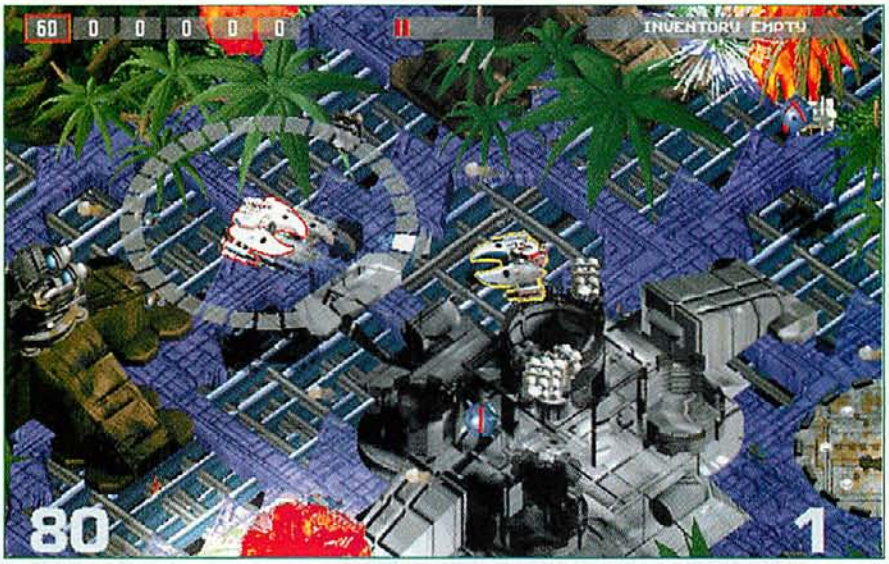
DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Flaming Fighters

EA's Flashy Arcade Shooter Is Entertaining, At A Price

by Paul C. Schuytema

In a far-flung system that knows nothing but war, it is up to you, as an agent of the Phantom Council, to uphold peace. Strapped into the deadly Jagger, Orion-Tech's ultimate surface fighting vehicle, and armed with nothing more than a collection of weapons and some sketchy orders, you must take to the air and destroy, destroy, destroy.



BURN ZONE As a pure arcade game, FIRE FIGHT holds up pretty well. The missions are challenging, the interface easy to grasp, and the controls a breeze to handle.



Price: $39.95
System Requirements: IBM-compatible Pentium-60 (P90 recommended), 8 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive, Windows 95, mouse, Win 95-compatible sound card.
of Players: 1 (2-8 in modem or net play)
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Developer: Chaos Works and Epic Megagames
Publisher: Electronic Arts
San Mateo, CA
(415) 571-7171
Reader Service #: 325

TWO STEPS FORWARD, ONE STEP BACK

At its heart, Electronic Arts' FIRE FIGHT is a shooter, much like the arcade classic ZAXXON or Sega's inventive Genesis cartridge HERZOG ZWEI. While the sexy SVGA graphics are pretty, the game boils down to navigating your ship through a 2D map, snatching up or destroying the mission objectives and blasting any enemies in your path. There are power-ups that make you live longer and fight better, and the weaponry on the Jagger is varied, though part of the fun is discovering what weapons work best in which situations.

FIRE FIGHT is a good arcade game, but the scale of the skewed 3D view is a little too large for my liking. Winning at this type of game requires the ability to anticipate danger, and while FIRE FIGHT does provide you with rudimentary threat radar, it's often inaccurate. At times, enemies and missile towers appear on the screen and begin to fire at you before you have enough time to react.

CHOPPIN' THROUGH WIN 95

The graphics are the game's strong point. The worlds of the four planets, from rain forests to glaciers, are sumptuous in 256-color SVGA. Each level is packed with imagery, but it's never so cluttered or complex that it requires a lot of time to figure out which way to go.

Unfortunately, there is a price for all the lush scenery: performance. The game took so long to load from the autoplay prompt that my screen saver kicked in. Once in the game, the animation suffered from constant choppiness, even on my P133 with 16 MB of RAM. The jerky movement was especially bothersome when trying to dodge and counterattack at the same time–precise aiming was almost impossible.

Multiplayer action is solid and predictable. I was disappointed by the DeathMatch-style mode, but the base-building game is challenging and entertaining. The idea is to gather bricks to build your own base planetside while stopping your opponents from doing the same. This extra layer of activity makes it a very fun and frenzied game. The best part of the multiplayer action isn't the play itself, but the fact that you get two CDs and two manuals, meaning you can draft a willing victim for head-to-head action right out of the box.

FIRE FIGHT is a fun game, but it's certainly not revolutionary. It does what it sets out to do fairly well, with the exception of the sluggish performance. The bottom line? If you've got a few minutes to spare on your coffee break, then FIRE FIGHT, with its pretty graphics and fun gameplay, would be a good diversion.

APPEAL: Arcade shooter junkies or those who want yet another game to play on the office LAN.

PROS: Great graphics and no-nonsense gameplay.

CONS: Slow gamespeed, and the action isn't anything new.

CG RATED

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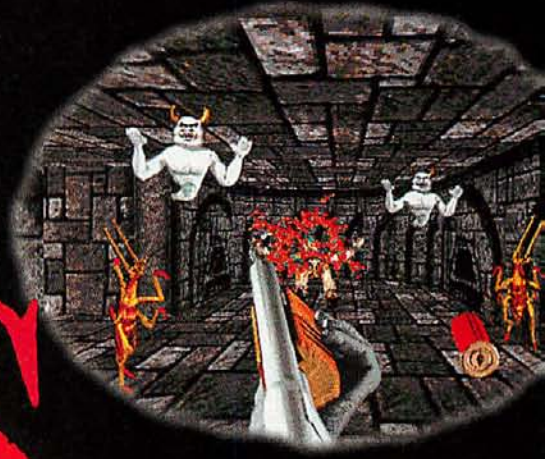
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Circle Reader Service #142

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Doomed Role-playing

The Collision Of Action And Role-playing In DEATHKEEP Is Fatal

by Petra Schlunk



GHOST IN THE MACHINE Like this transparent wraith, DEATHKEEP is only a wisp of a game. Not quite action and not quite RPG, it won't satisfy either gaming crowd.

In SSI's DEATHKEEP, role-playing and action meet in a manner reminiscent of a matter-antimatter collision–an explosive reaction that leaves absolutely nothing of the two ingredients behind.

In the game's story, you must stop an evil necromancer from becoming horribly powerful. Because DEATHKEEP is set in an AD&D world, one would expect the game to feature certain requisite role-playing elements. Aside from the fact that the characters, monsters and weapons are standard AD&D fare, you'd assume that levels increase with experience, and that the game world is composed of dungeons that must be explored thoroughly. Unfortunately, there's little of that real *role-playing* material here.



Price: $49.99
System Requirements: IBM-compatible 486-66 (Pentium recommended), 8 MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, 3 MB hard drive space, 1 MB video RAM (Windows display accelerator recommended), mouse; requires Windows-compatible sound card.
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Lion Entertainment, Inc.
Publisher: Strategic Simulations, Inc. Sunnyvale, CA (408) 737-6800
Reader Service #: 326

This real-time, first-person perspective game actually has features in common with popular action games. To leave almost every one of the nearly 20 dungeons in DEATHKEEP, even those with multiple levels, you have to find several keys that unlock doors leading to the appropriate exit, a la the classics DESCENT and DOOM. There are also some monsters in the dungeons, but they are fairly easy to defeat, even in the final battle, and not very scary. In other words, despite the push toward action, you're not going to get an adrenaline rush playing this game.

TOYS FOR THE TAKING

Basically, DEATHKEEP is a long dungeon cakewalk. With lots of levels to explore, all sorts of secret doors, traps, jumping puzzles, and ridiculous amounts of treasure to find, expect to be kept busy (though not necessarily amused) while playing. The treasures include enough food, potions, scrolls, weapons, armor, and miscellaneous magical and mundane items to keep your character well equipped (almost *too* well equipped) for the challenges ahead.

The labyrinthine, multiple-level dungeons can be confusing to traverse, a situation that is ameliorated by a pretty fair automapping system. The automap can be set to display all the locations your character has seen or physically traveled through in the course of the game. This latter feature is very helpful in several of DEATHKEEP's mazes. The game's interface is fairly easy to use after only a few minutes of play. Best of all, there are many saved game slots—handy for some complex jumping sequences reminiscent of those in PAGAN.

LOWERING THE STANDARDS?

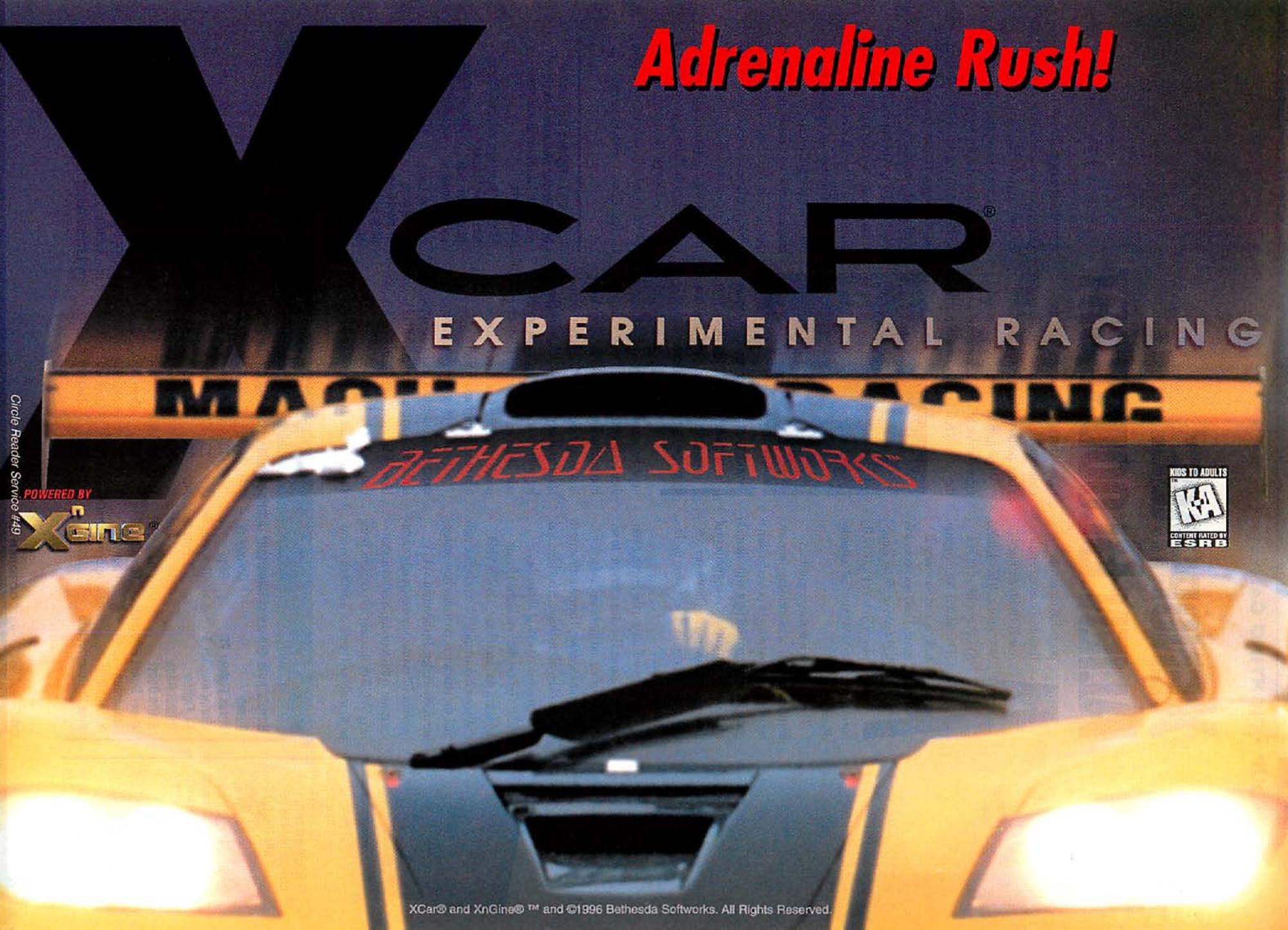
DEATHKEEP is an exploration game with a veneer of story; a shadow of role-playing thanks to the AD&D monsters, items and characters; and a mirage of action due to its real-time nature. Its graphics, sound effects and music are fair, neither adding to nor detracting from the game, although the movement slowdowns that occur can make DEATHKEEP frustrating to play. This game is unlikely to satisfy either role-playing or action fans: It doesn't have enough role-playing elements for the former, and its pace is far too leisurely for the latter. Given these caveats, DEATHKEEP might, at best, provide a mildly enjoyable diversion while you're waiting for this season's better games to released. But then again, that would be like feeding a starving dog a rubber bone, wouldn't it?

APPEAL: DEATHKEEP is for role-players who secretly crave some action or for people who find traditional action games a little too challenging.

PROS: Numerous complex dungeons and loads of treasure for explorers and treasure-grabbers.

CONS: Despite its apparent cross-genre appeal, there are insufficient role-playing elements for role-players and not enough excitement for most action fans. The glitchy movement system sometimes slows movement to a crawl.

CG RATED



Circle Reader Service #49

XENOPHAGE: ALIEN BLOODSPORT

Apogee has thrown its hat into the arena with a new 2D fighting game, XENOPHAGE. It has detailed SVGA graphics that look 3D rendered, but the game really is a side-scrolling 2D game. That's not necessarily bad if you've got the gameplay of STREET FIGHTER II, but in a game like XENOPHAGE, it certainly doesn't help.

The story here is that representatives from several alien races, including humans, have been spirited away by powerful alien gods. These aliens must fight to the death in a bloody tournament for the amusement of these powerful overseers: The winner gets to live another day; the loser forfeits the life of his entire race.

Two things will hit you the first time you fire up this game: The characters are, to say the least, lame, and the blood and gore in this title are excessive. There are some pretty weird-looking aliens duking it out here, and the humans don't look at all like they're ready to fight—the lone human female fights in a skirt and blouse. Look at VFPC; real women don't trade blows in office garb. Still, the characters, no matter how strange, are nicely rendered in beautiful SVGA graphics. Of course, since every other fighting game in this roundup is either in stunning SVGA or amazing 3D polygons, being pretty really isn't much of a distinction anymore. What is better though, is that the characters are large and detailed, taking up a large portion of the screen.

Worse than the silly characters are their fighting styles. In VFPC, characters look like they're really fighting; they employ real fighting styles, and when they punch, they throw their bodies into it. In XENOPHAGE, the human characters look like they don't know how to fight. Selena's front kick is an example of such ineptitude. She throws out her leg, with her arms hanging limply by her side. That's not how you fight. What happened to keeping your arms up for protection or following through with your kick?



TAKE THAT XENOPHAGE has some implausible characters (would you fight in high heels and a skirt?) that don't know how to fight, but plenty of blood.

As far as the blood and guts go, this game spews them out in torrents. Even simple slashes from an alien creature spill buckets of blood. Major combos color the entire floor crimson. For the MORTAL KOMBAT crowd, this is great, but if you find all the gore distasteful, among the numerous options Apogee provides is one for tweaking the level of gore, mercifully.

XENOPHAGE's gameplay isn't exactly great; compared to the amount of time evidently put into graphics and bloody details, the actual gameplay seems to have been overlooked. Sure, you have the usual assortment of special moves, different characters to learn, combos and ending moves reminiscent of the MORTAL KOMBAT fatalities and animalities. Yet, underneath all that, you won't find much that distinguishes XENOPHAGE from other fighting games. Only the outward shell does that; inside, you have characters that aren't different enough or well-balanced enough to make you want to try out each character, and much of the fighting seems to be too much like MORTAL KOMBAT. In the end, you have a fighting game that plays more like RISE 2 than VIRTUA FIGHTER PC.

APPEAL: Fighting fans tired of MORTAL KOMBAT who aren't afraid to play with lots of blood and weird characters.

PROS: Nice, big, detailed characters; lots of blood (if you like that sort of thing).

CONS: Lame characters; mediocre gameplay; just another MK ripoff.

CG RATED

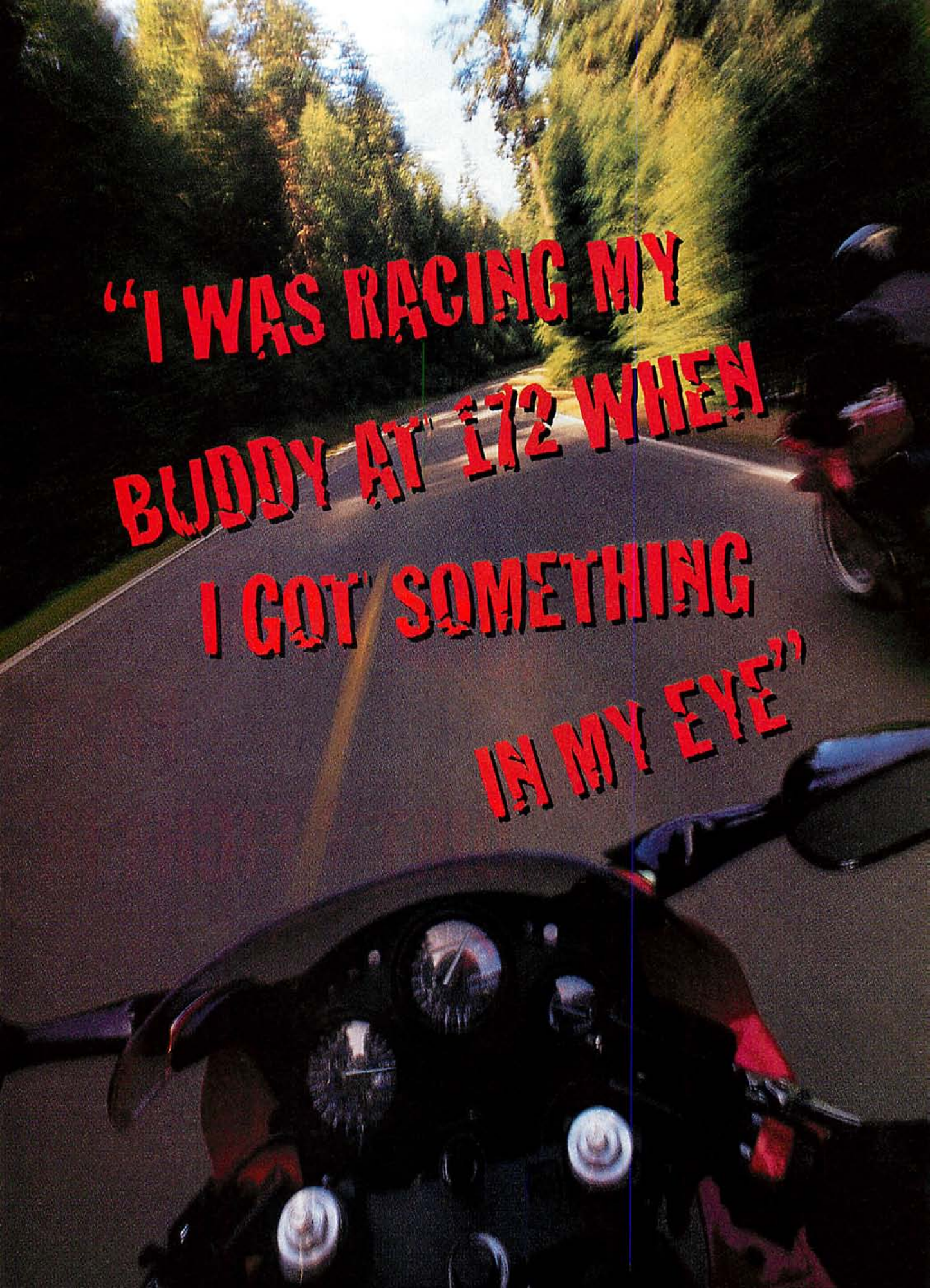


Price: To be announced
System Requirements: IBM-compatible 486-66, 16 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 4x CD-ROM drive, 24 MB hard drive space, DOS 5.0, 16-bit sound card; supports IPX network.
of Players: 1–2
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Argos
Publisher: FormGen
Scottsdale, AZ
(888) 367-6436
Reader Service #: 323

Round Robin

Here's how the most important fighting games stack up on the PC.

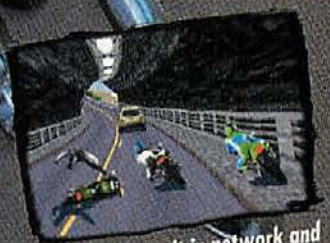
Game	Company	2D or 3D	Gameplay	Grade	Comments
Virtua Fighter PC	Sega	3D	Deep	A–	First 3D fighter; best fighter on PC
Mortal Kombat 3	GT Interactive	2D	Medium	B–	The original bloody 2D fighter
FX Fighter	GTE Entertainment	3D	Shallow	B–	First 3D fighter on the PC
Primal Rage	Time Warner	2D	Shallow	C+	Dinosaurs and giant apes awash in blood
Battle Beast	7th Level	2D	Shallow	C	Cute robots fighting in story mode
Super Street Fighter II	Capcom	2D	Deep	C	A bad port of the great classic
Toshinden	Playmates	3D	Shallow	C–	Nice 3D, bad gameplay
Xenophage	Apogee/FormGen	2D	Shallow	C–	Lame fighters; lots of blood
Rise 2: Resurrection	Acclaim	2D	Shallow	D	Pretty robots duking it out


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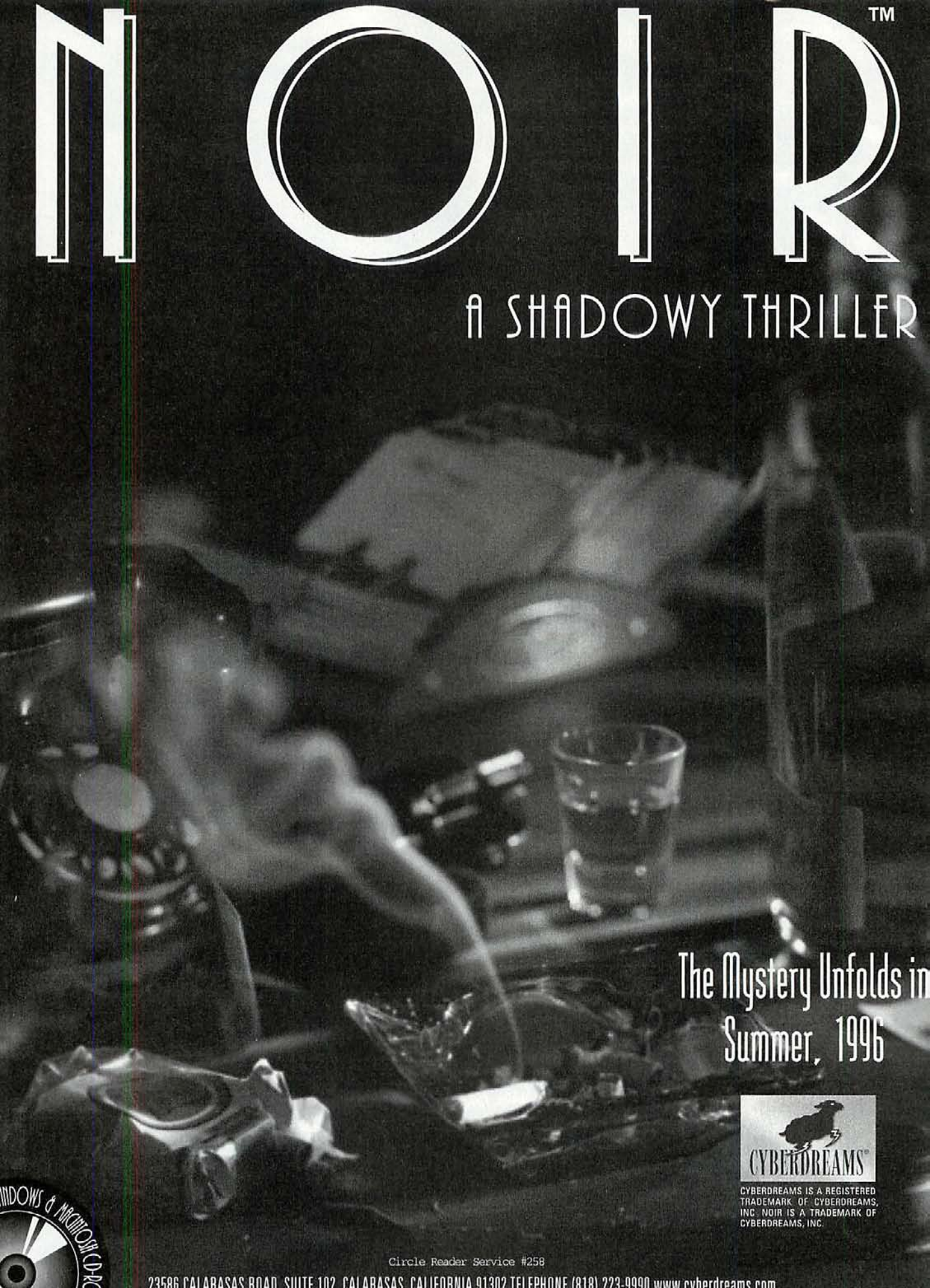
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ESRB

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If I Only Had A Brain

Puzzle Games Should Be More Fun Than The SAT



Back in school, people thought I was crazy when I told them I enjoyed taking the SAT. And when I told them that the reason I didn't like the GRE as much was that the logic puzzles in its "analytical" section were too easy, they usually tried to strangle me. But how could it be otherwise for someone reared on *Games* magazine, the puzzle column in *Omni*, and Martin Gardner's mathematical conundra?

I have long suspected that one problem with IQ and scholastic aptitude tests is that they unfairly favor people who, because they have a taste for puzzles, spend long hours in their childhood figuring out what number comes next in a certain series, which of several shapes doesn't fit with the others, and in light of a set of arcane relationships, which boat—red, orange, yellow, green, and blue—is owned by Arthur, Bill, Carol, Dawn, and Edward. A person who has experience answering a certain type of question will surely do better answering that type of question when it appears on a test than one who doesn't. Unless you argue that a taste for puzzles correlates with intelligence (possible, though I seriously doubt it), this doesn't say anything about the person's innate intelligence. What it does say is that if you want your kids to do better on their tests you might want to get them started solving puzzles, if not actually taking simulated IQ tests, early.



MENSA TRAINING From dizzy dice to word problems to 3D spatial manipulations, BRAINSTORM! offers more IQ tests than enjoyable stimulation.

STOP MENTAL ATROPHY NOW!

Some recent computer games give you a chance to do both. One of them, Simon & Schuster Interactive's BRAINSTORM!, explicitly suggests that its function transcends mere entertainment—your first sign of danger. And it suggests that even if you have no kids, you may do well to solve some puzzles yourself. You see, studies show that the human brain tends to atrophy after age 20 or so, not coincidentally the same time that formal schooling typically ends. In other words, play BRAINSTORM! or you'll get Alzheimer's.

Unfortunately, BRAINSTORM! is the kind of product that gives IQ tests a bad name. All flash and little substance, BRAINSTORM! is simultaneously over- and underdesigned. On one hand, it is full of useless frippery: pictures of neon-colored crystals and glowing metal masks, crackling lightning strikes and thrumming

> **"Simon & Schuster suggests that BRAINSTORM! transcends mere entertainment—your first sign of danger."**

CHECK!

It's official: YOU DON'T KNOW JACK II, the sequel to the winner of *CGW*'s best puzzle/classic game award for 1995, will be released by Berkeley Systems this fall—more questions, more irreverence. Need we say more?

▸The old HONG KONG MAHJONG PRO has been revamped by the original designer for Windows. We were pretty impressed with what we saw—expect the full story next issue.



JACK ATTACK
While you're waiting for YOU DON'T KNOW JACK II, you might consider the YOU DON'T KNOW JACK XL (extra-large) edition. It's hard to find a better party game.

▸For now, CHESSMASTER 5000 rules the pawn-pushing roost. Sierra, however, plans to challenge its supremacy with POWER CHESS. No real date has been confirmed on its release, we'll let you know as Sierra's opening repertoire shows itself.

▸In other Chess news, by the time you read this, COREL CHESS (yes, Corel) will be making its move in the highly competitive, and evidently lucrative, castling arena. Look for a full review next issue.

synthesizer chords on the soundtrack, excessively arty photography. But it's a Potemkin village: Behind the ritzy facade is a paucity that beggars the imagination. In seven practice tests of 20 questions apiece, the same question types turn up again and again. (In all, I estimate that there are only seven or eight distinct types.) Then, when you move from the practice section to the "real" test, you find not only the same types of questions but the same *questions*. Of course, you've crammed on those questions already, so you know all the right answers. For filling them in mechanically, the computer awards you a "141+" IQ rating. What lesson does that teach kids?

To fill out the package, BRAINSTORM! also contains a set of audio files about the human brain that sound like those filmstrips they used to show in high school ("The human brain is the supreme achievement of nature...an average weight of only three pounds...the more we learn, the more we realize how little we know...") and a catch-all "Mindbusters" section allegedly containing "rebuses," "brainteasers," and "puzzles." Only one of the "rebuses" is an actual rebus; the other nine are what *Games* magazine used to call Wacky Wordies, and are poor examples of the type at that. (For instance, you see "forwellmed" and are supposed to guess "well informed.") The Puzzles section contains all of five puzzles of the sort you used to get in math class: A train pulls into a tunnel at 50 mph, it's a quarter of a mile long, the tunnel's a mile and a half long, yadda yadda yadda. The Brain Teasers section is the most appalling: it contains a grand total of two brain teasers which, in



Price: $44.95
System Requirements: 486-25 processor, Windows 3.1, 8 MB RAM, 11 MB hard drive space, 256-color VGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, Sound Blaster 16 or compatible sound card.
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Publisher: Simon & Schuster Interactive
New York, NY
(800) 983-5333
Reader Service #: 341

CG TIPS!

BRAINSTORM!

▸ For multiple-choice questions, start by eliminating one or two choices that are obviously wrong. Then, even if you are forced to guess among the remaining choices, you've improved your odds by as much as 13 percent—especially good for speeding through timed tests.

▸ When asked to envision a flat shape folded into a cube, eliminate all answers in which adjacent squares on the flat shape turn into opposite faces of the cube. This is impossible.

▸ If you have to select the symbol that doesn't belong out of a set of similar-looking symbols, start by mentally pairing up symbols that are identical to each other either entirely or on a characteristic-by-characteristic basis. If two symbols are the same, neither can be the outlier.—*Charles Ardai*

SMART GAMES: CHALLENGE #1

▸ *Warehouse*—Remember that since balls can only be pushed, not pulled, there is no way to get one out of a corner, and that a ball's mobility is cut in half once it is touching a wall. The longer you can keep a ball away from a wall, the longer you preserve your flexibility.

▸ *Word Builder*—When making as many words as you can using each letter in the alphabet only once, remember that vowels are your most precious resource: there are only 5 (maybe 6) to match up with 20 or 21 consonants. Avoid short words and words with double vowels (*lie, boa*); try to think of words with consonant clusters (*grasp, thong*).

▸ *Cash Crop*—Where you have a limited number of moves in which to drive your tractor over squares in a grid marked with dollar amounts, don't be afraid to use up a move crossing back over a square you've already cleared. You don't make any money from that move, but it is possible that your total income will be higher than if you had moved in another direction.
—*Charles Ardai*



TOUGH RIND TO GRIND Getting a monopoly on the orange properties let you "squeeze the pulp" from the opposition—especially after they get out of Jail.

MONOPOLY

▸ A simple solution to defend yourself against house-happy builders is to play with the normal limits for houses–only the ones that "come with" the bank—rather than letting the computer generate an unlimited supply. Build as many houses as you can to use up the supply, then watch gleefully as your opponents must either build all the way up to hotels (an expensive prospect for Boardwalk and Park Place), or wait until new houses are available. This gives you plenty of negotiating room to complete your own monopolies, as well as to buy time to collect enough dough for your own hotel purchases.

▸ Once the game is in the final stages, railroads become more sentimental than practical. If it gains you a monopoly, let someone have the third railroad, or even the fourth. The chances that you'll land on more than one railroad are minimal, and the $200 you get for passing Go is enough to cover a ride on the Reading.

▸ Jail is a safe haven. Wait there as long as possible, especially late in the game, when rents are higher.

▸ The most cost-efficient properties are the orange section: St. James Place, Tennessee Avenue and New York Avenue. Those leaving Jail, for example, have a 39 percent chance of landing on one of these three properties.–*Terry Coleman*

addition to being magnificently random, require you to get out paper and pencil, since the designers have neglected to allow players to do their figuring—or even enter their solution—on the screen. ("Fill in the missing numbers," say the instructions to one brain teaser, but there is literally no way for you to do so, short of drawing on the monitor with a marker.)

A GREATER CHALLENGE

Fortunately, people looking for an IQ challenge do have alternatives. Chief among these is SMART GAMES' CHALLENGE #1, which I reviewed in the July issue. I can't recommend it highly enough. The precise opposite of BRAINSTORM!, CHALLENGE #1 looks good but doesn't go off the deep end pursuing snazzy visuals and sound effects, has a well-designed interface that doesn't leave you wondering whether it's you or the game's designer that's an idiot; and most of all, offers plenty of depth. There are 20 puzzle types (there's that magic number again), including some of the same types BRAINSTORM! has, but within each type there are up to 20 variations, ranging in difficulty from very easy to very hard. You can play CHALLENGE #1 for hours without ever feeling you've exhausted what it has to throw at you. Partly this is because there is no way to get an answer from the computer—you just have to find the answers for yourself, and if you can't that's your problem. But mainly it's because the game is packed like a sardine can with genuinely clever, difficult puzzles that will engage any puzzle addict's imagination.

If I were a parent, I know which of these games I'd give my kids to play. Hell, I know which one I will go back to myself long after the reviews have been published. It's been a few years since I was 20, after all, and, as they say, a mind is a terrible thing to waste. My thanks go to BRAINSTORM! for the medical advice—if I'm lucky I'll be able to stop the cerebral atrophy before I become a senile dotard of 30—but it's CHALLENGE #1, not BRAINSTORM!, that gets my business.



THE SMART MOVE BRAINSTORM! has some of the same types of puzzles as SMART GAMES CHALLENGE #1, but CHALLENGE #1 knows the secret: You learn more when you're having fun.



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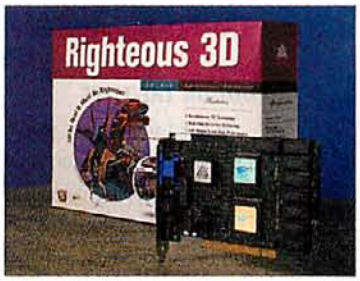
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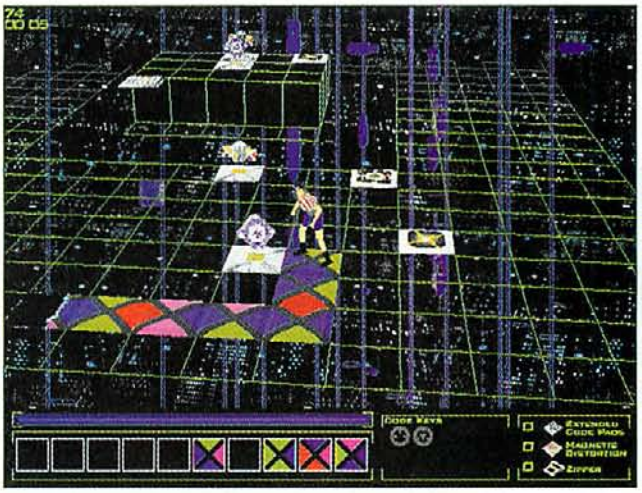
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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY · INTERMEDIATE · ADVANCED

Voracious Virus Left Me Hungry

Barely A Trace Of TETRIS In TRACER

by Tim Carter



WHAT, NO PASTELS? Cyberspace in TRACER is heavy on primary colors, nearly as repetitive as the tiles you lay.

Ever since TETRIS escaped from the former Soviet Union, the market for puzzle games has exploded. Unfortunately, retailers' shelves and discount bins have been cluttered ever since with pretenders to the puzzle crown. Few of these games have blossomed into addictive, enjoyable time-wasters the way TETRIS did. 7th Level's TRACER–the latest entry into the TETRIS replacement sweepstakes–falls equally short of reaching the puzzle throne.

OUT ON THE TILES

As a hot-shot hacker, you navigate various bits of computer hardware with a tracer virus nipping at your heels. Your character begins the game with a preset number of tiles, each with four colored sides. You move over the grid by placing a tile on the floor, then stepping on it. From the first tile, you can place another tile in any direction, as long as its facing color matches the color of the tile you are standing on. Once you start, the virus starts eating away at the square you started on, and it moves fast. Thus, the game becomes a sort of speed dominoes, as you race to lay tiles quick enough to stay in front of the ravenous virus.

Because your supply of tiles is limited, the key to success in TRACER is maneuvering from one resupply station to the next. As one might expect, the stations are strategically located to push the limits of your ability to plan on the run and get your color patterns right the first time. (As with most games of this type, saving often is a good idea.)

Unfortunately, this dependence on resupply stations means that you don't have much flexibility in planning your attack; for the most part, you must follow the supply of tiles with little or no deviation. This gives the game a "maze without walls" feel, which can become frustrating. Also, there is no overhead view of the level you are on, which makes strategic planning difficult.

What you have instead is a 3D race between your character and the virus, made more difficult by the way the interface handles your perspective of the grid. TRACER uses the standard above-and-behind perspective, but your viewpoint relative to your alter-ego on the grid swings somewhat dramatically, depending on which way your character is turning and where he is on the grid. This is quite important, as your view of the surrounding area is limited, and you must be able to see the next reload station in order to move properly.

FLIMSY FICTION

The introduction, documentation and occasional messages from your robotic controller all suggest that as you complete each level you progress through the story–all to no avail. What difference does it make who my character is and why he is running from tile to tile, if it doesn't actually affect the tiles or the grid on which they are laid?

In the end, TRACER actually reminds me of solitaire. Admittedly, you have some control over the flow of the game, but ultimately you are confined by the structure of the game itself. Thus, TRACER is more diversion than game–albeit a diversion that is relatively attractive and fast paced. On the other hand, if you are looking to replace TETRIS on your hard drive, keep looking.



Price: $34.95
System Requirements: IBM-compatible Pentium 75 or better, Windows 95, 8 MB RAM, 2 MB hard drive space, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM.
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Future Endeavors, Inc.
Publisher: 7th Level, Inc. Richardson, TX (214) 437-4858
Reader Service #: 327

APPEAL: Those who enjoy relatively mindless, speedy puzzle games.

PROS: Runs smoothly; easy to learn and play.

CONS: No strategy element; nothing to distinguish it from many other, cheaper, puzzle games.

CG RATED


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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

More Lovable Lilliputians

Lemmings Leap Into Win 95 Packing Paintball Guns

by Charlotte Panther

Those of you who've encountered LEMMINGS before will recall that, much like CCW staffers at lunchtime, these cerebrally challenged critters follow the leader without thinking or caring where they are headed until it's too late. In LEMMINGS PAINTBALL, the latest escapade from Psygnosis, you'll get to know a few of these cute and cuddly creatures on a more personal level. As in LEMMINGS, the idea of the game is to guide your furry friends safely through an obstacle-ridden landscape before your time runs out. Unlike the original version, in which you were responsible for a whole pack of pests, this time you'll have to care for no more than four lemmings at a time.

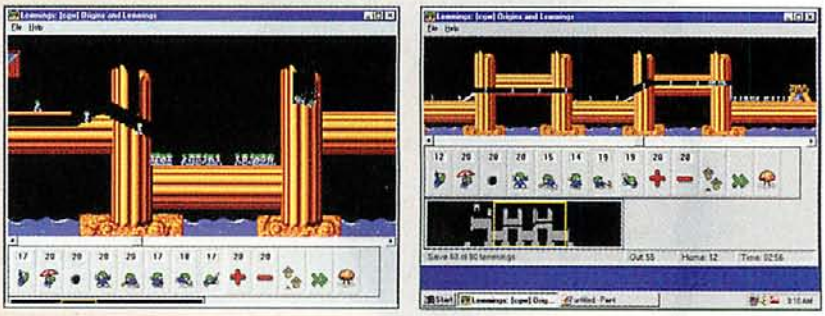
A squeaky "Let's Go" indicates that the vociferous vermin are about to be released from a trap door suspended in mid air. From there on, it's up to you. The first few levels start easily enough: You guide a single lemming across a landscape (Point-and-Click 101) to retrieve a flag that signifies the end of each game. Don't be fooled, though. You'll soon find yourself maneuvering one lemming over a vast neon vista, avoiding watery depths, pools of fire and heated coals, while another lemming searches for levers that operate lifts in order to allow yet another lemming to jump to higher ground.

Also look for balloons, which help you drift over water or fire, trampolines to help you bounce to safety, keys to unlock barriers—and perhaps most importantly, paintballs. The rambunctious rodents, fully armed with a paint guns, are not as harm-

Two Lemmings Are Better Than One

LEMMINGS PAINTBALL definitely deserves a place in your puzzle collection, if only for the well-adapted Win 95 version of the original LEMMINGS that's included. LEMMINGS, which was originally designed for the Amiga and Atari systems, later became available in a problematic DOS version, which was incompatible with several video cards. PC users will be happy to know that *finally*, we have a near-perfect version of this Hall of Fame game. The new Win 95 version also has additional sound effects, including delightful lemming squeals. You also get additional new games—OH NO, MORE LEMMINGS. As you guide the lemmings through grand structures, assigning them different skills, you'll be surprised to discover just how talented these rascally rodents can be: Watch them build, mine, bash, climb, float and dig their way to safety before the clock strikes. And although the call of the ocean is still alluring to these mop-topped vermin, far worse fates may lay ahead: One false move in the Lemming Tomato Ketchup Facility, and your furry friends will be mush.

My only major gripe was, once again, with the resolution. While the game offers both high- and low-res options, you'll soon discover that when you run the game under low resolution, the lemmings are so miniscule as to affect play. If you try to apply the high-res option, however, the viewing window becomes bigger than the screen, resulting in the loss of the stop watch that allows you to keep track of how you're doing for time. Nonetheless, this every-second-counts puzzle remains a classic, requiring quick thinking, strategic skills and impeccable timing.



HIGH OR LOW? LEMMINGS for Win 95 lets you dig, build, climb, float and perish in high-res (left), but plays better in low-res (right) with the full interface visible.



Price: $49
System Requirements: IBM-compatible 486 DX2-66, Windows 95, 8 MB RAM, 1 MB hard drive space, 256 color VGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, Windows 95-compatible sound.
of Players: 1-2 (network)
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Visual Sciences
Publisher: Psygnosis
Foster City, CA
(800) 438-7794
Reader Service #: *328*

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HELIUM HELPER Instead of trading the usual aquatic fate for a fiery death, our cute little friend hops to the next balloon to safety in LEMMINGS PAINTBALL.

less as they look. With enemy lemmings lurking around every corner, you'll do well to pick up extra ammo whenever you can.

The lemmings also seem to have picked up an iota of common sense along the way; once you have clicked on a leader, you can actually instruct the others *not* to follow him.

Each level of the game is completed only when your lemming retrieves a flag. Sometimes, there'll be just one flag hidden, which any lemming can grab; other times you may need four lemmings to pick up one flag each before completing the level. If one of your faithful crew gets drowned along the way, don't panic—you just need to search for a duplicator, then you can reproduce lemmings to your heart's content. But don't forget—you have to beat the clock if you want avoid lemming elimination.

Each game provides a different landscape and many new surprises. This, in addition to four levels of difficulty (Fun, Tricky, Taxing and Mayhem) allows for endless replay value. The perky characters with their shrill little mousy squeaks and the background sound effects add to the attraction. The downside? Despite the high-resolution graphics, the visuals remain highly pixelated and disappointingly grainy. And will someone please tell me why we have to have that annoying Muzak-like sound track accompanying all puzzles these days?

Despite these little hitches, LEMMINGS PAINTBALL gets my vote as a winner. The user-friendly interface and easy lower levels make it a great game for beginners, but the higher levels remain difficult and varied enough to maintain the interest of diehard lemmings fans. And as Psygnosis is including the original LEMMINGS and OH NO, MORE LEMMINGS on the disc, you get three games for the price of one. Now, a bargain like that doesn't come along every day. CG

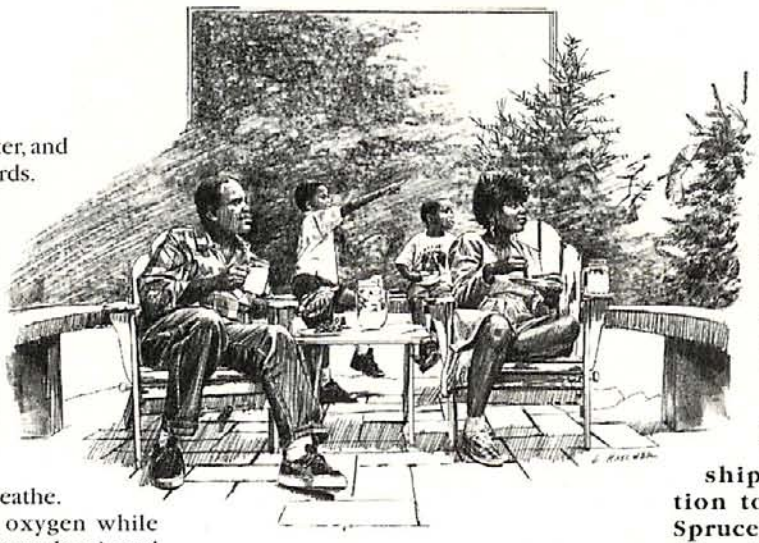
APPEAL: For hardcore puzzlers and LEMMINGS lovers.

PROS: Highly addictive LEMMINGS gameplay finally makes it to Win 95, without compromising skill level.

CONS: LEMMINGS PAINTBALL isn't quite up to the original. Some disappointing graphics and grating background music.

CG RATED

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DAGGERFALL

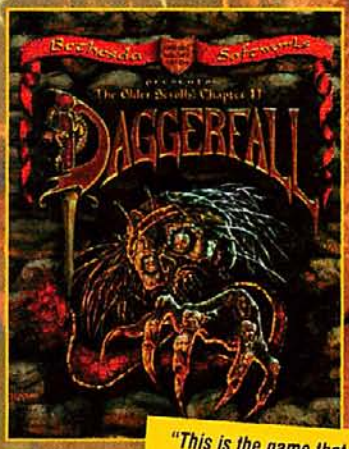
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Revolutionary!
—Johnny Wilson
Editor-in-Chief,
Computer Gaming World



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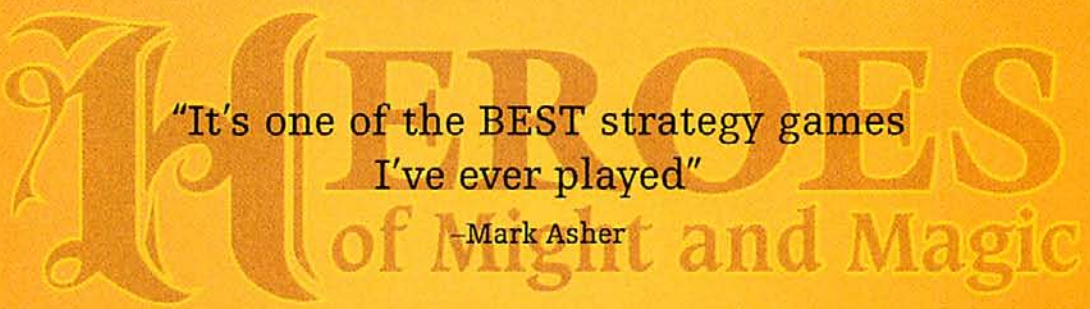
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–Wade Glasscock



"It's one of the BEST strategy games I've ever played"

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"Heroes of Might and Magic is an excellent game"

–Tony Damiani

"It's great, wonderful, long term play value (Win 95 version), and highly addicting"

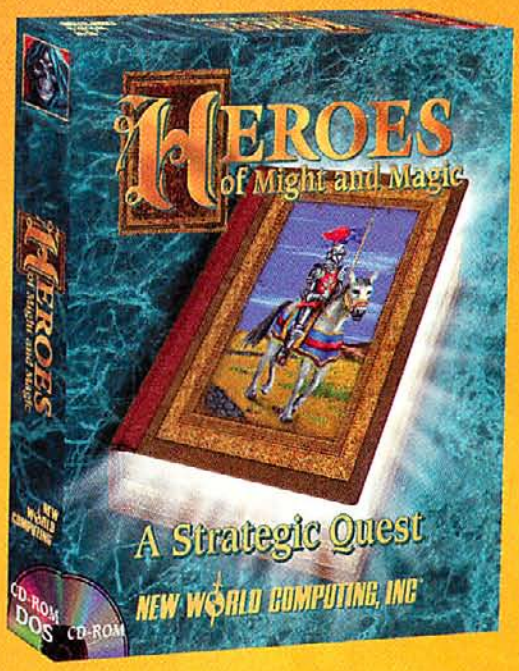
–Barbara Christensen

"An excellent and entertaining game"

–Darrin Fesperman

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[Great Year!]



[Great Game!]

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Scoring On The Open Net

Surfing The Web For Cool Game Add-ons



Every kid has a favorite NFL star. Mine was Fran Tarkenton. The original scrambling quarterback, Sir Francis was the soul of the Minnesota Vikings in the '70s, but came up small in three heartbreaking trips to the Super Bowl. I've always wondered how a team with Tarkenton and a supporting cast of halfback Chuck Foreman, Hall of Fame defensive tackle Alan Page, and perennial All-Pro free safety Paul Krause could flop in the big dance with such depressing regularity. In later years, while playing FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL PRO, I often wished I could rewrite the Purple Gang's sorry Super Bowl history, but, alas, Sierra only included teams back to the early '90s with their product. Would there be no relief for this frustrated Vikings fan? Would my only modern day sighting of Fran Tarkenton occur while watching late night cable TV infomercials?

FRONT PAGE FANTASIES

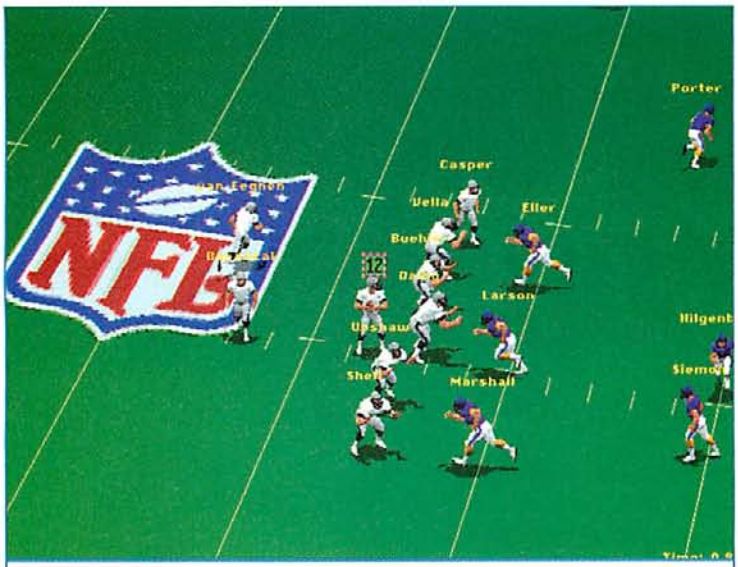
It took the Internet and Mike Gibrall to ease my pain. Gibrall, a rabid football gamer pursuing his own field of dreams, found that if you build it, they will come—to your Web site, that is, and they'll download it once they get there. Gibrall is no stranger to the online sports gaming community, with a well-deserved reputation for roster tinkering. In fact he's been designing custom teams since the days of Avalon Hill's SUPER BOWL SUNDAY, a title so old that it shipped on cassette tape! Gibrall's home page (**http://www.esslink.com/~mpfl/fpsf.htm**) features the most exciting set of classic teams you'll find anywhere. His hand-crafted collection features 46 vintage powerhouses, such as the Jim Brown–fueled 1964 Cleveland Browns. (Hey, remember when they had pro football in Cleveland?) There's also Vince Lombardi's '66 Packers, and great AFL clubs like the '68 Jets led by QB Joe Namath. Of course, Gibrall's site also offers the undefeated 1972 Dolphins, those devastating Steel Curtain defenses, the dominant Joe Montana–era 49ers, and enough others to ruin your social life for a very long time. Gibrall's teams are fun, accurate and come in both the '95 and '96 flavors of the industry's best-selling football game.

Of course, FRONT PAGE veterans know that the play's the thing. If you're searching for just the right combination of X's and O's to confound your opponents, check out **http://hector.unil.ch/~94418290/fbpro/htm**, a gold mine of custom plays for Sierra's football games. Shades of ESPN SportsCenter, there's even a Play Of The Week! Here you'll find 52—count 'em—groups of custom plays created by hard-core FRONT PAGE freaks from the world over. Want to block more punts? Interested in a defense that racks up 30-plus sacks per game? How about an entire West Coast offense? They're all here for the asking, along with coaching profiles and links to over 40

> **"You'll find the heart of sports gaming on the Web—leagues to join, extras to download and plenty of sports fans."**

ON DECK

- More on EA's upcoming NBA LIVE 97: We got a look at some of the early screens for the game, and, along with the already announced 3D polygonal players, EA is completely revamping the interface, going for a funky ESPN2-style graphic approach. The earliest on-court screens show that the game is going to look almost nothing like its best-selling 2D predecessor, but will be much closer to the Sony Playstation title SHOOT OUT. Considering that SHOOT OUT's the most stunning-looking basketball game now available on any platform that's a good thing. We'll keep passing you more info about this hotly anticipated game as we get it.
- Accolade is prepping the newest entry to its JACK NICKLAUS golf series, tentatively (and cleverly) titled JACK NICKLAUS GOLF, which will feature a "course architect" that allows users to create 18-hole golf courses from the ground up. If you're into foursomes, the game will also support multiple players for LAN, modem-to-modem and Internet play.



THEM WERE THE DAYS The Oakland Raiders move the ball against the Vikes in a 1976 Super Bowl replay in FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO '96. I downloaded both teams from Mike Gibrall's Web page, which features 46 classic lineups of yesteryear.

leagues you can join.

While you're at it, don't forget to check out the FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL 95/96 Utilities Download Suite at **http://www.compusmart.ab.ca/lsundby/index.htm**. Gaming wizard Lorne Sundby offers a variety of free add-ons, including draft and roster utilities guaranteed to relieve some of the wash-day drudgery of league management chores.

DISCO PUCK

If you're getting the idea that only FRONT PAGE FOOTBALL is well represented in cyberspace, think again, puck breath. A quick skate over to Nguyen-Anh Le's Disco Palace, **http://web.cps.msu.edu/~len/hockey/**, will answer all your NHL 95 and NHL 96 questions. This site ices the title of coolest hockey gaming spot on the Web, racking up over 100,000 gamer visits in the past year. Fans of EA's NHL series flock to Disco Palace for its comprehensive gameplay tips and league information, as well as the chance to download player editors, game patches, highlights, utilities and roster updates.

Another popular EA sports title, NBA LIVE 96, is the inspiration behind German gamemeister Tim Tschirner's site (**http://www-users.informatik.rwth-aachen.de/~timt/nba96.html**). If it exists for either NBA LIVE 95 or 96, you can bet that this *schlam-und-dunk* of a page has it, including a neat roster trick that adds missing players, a utility for editing skill ratings, a patch that adds 29 top NCAA teams, and links to a multitude of NBA-related stops on the Infobahn.

With the Major League baseball pennant races in full swing as this issue hits the street, you'll no doubt be feeling the urge to step up to the virtual plate of your favorite baseball sim. Is TONY LARUSSA 3 1996 your game? Stop by Nick Keren's Ultimate Utilities page (**http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/NickKeren/**). If it's got anything to do with league or player management, this spot has a custom utility that TONY players won't want to leave home without. Keren also has a variety of universes available for downloading, including some for the older TLB 2.0. Naturally, gamers can also link to leagues and other TONY sites of interest.

On the other hand, if statistics are your passion, perhaps games like STRAT-O-MATIC or APBA put the starch in your baseball cap. A pair of recommended pages include Adam Wodon's most excellent (and most unofficial) StratWeb (**http://www.enter.net/~adamw/strat.html**) devoted to the STRAT-O-MATIC family of games. StratWeb offers patches, demos and roster modifications for SOM's baseball and basketball offerings, as well as an entire baseball encyclopedia's worth of information about these games. If you're just dying to test your managerial skills in a STRAT-O-MATIC league, you'll find plenty of choices here.

An APBA site that's worth the price of admission can be found at **http://lamar.colostate.edu/~drj/apba.html**. An offshoot of the well-known Buck Weaver BBS, this site has links, utilities and add-ons for both APBA and BASEBALL FOR WINDOWS. Although the page at one time offered classic seasons, this appears to be on hold at present due to copyright concerns.

But wait! There's more to sporting life on the net than just clicking your way to the URL next door. Hard-core players (like you) really ought to be following the discussions in the **comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.sport** section of the Usenet newsgroups for up-to-date information and opinions on computer sports gaming. Discussion groups are great equalizers, since everyone has a say. In fact, it's not uncommon for major industry players to check in, as Sierra CEO Ken Williams did this summer when FRONT PAGE SPORTS: BASEBALL 96 was taking some serious online heat. Despite the occasional flame war, this group provides an invaluable resource for keeping up with gaming's day-to-day happenings, so don't miss it.

You'll notice that this month I stayed away from official game company pages. While such sites abound on the Web, they're easy enough to find, being listed each month on CGW's Patches page as well as on our Web site (**http://www.zdnet.com/gaming/**) and in most game advertisements. The official pages are, of course, quite useful for tech support, and deliver the corporate spin, but it's so much more fun to dial in to the unofficial side of the Net. That's where you'll find the true heart of sports gaming—leagues to join, extras to download and dedicated players that share your sports mania. Oh, and in case you were wondering what happened with my Vikings and their Super Bowl replay, let's just say that Fran Tarkenton should stick to infomercials.

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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Outpost In Left Field

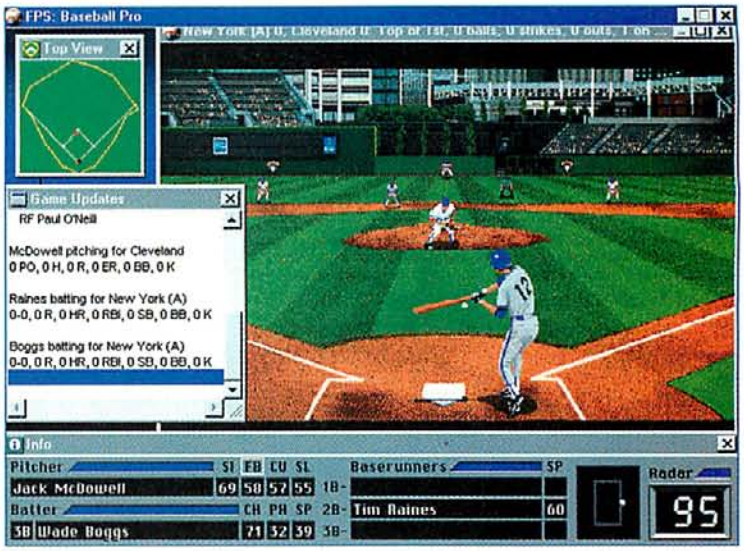
Sierra Builds A Field Of Nightmares With FPS Baseball Pro

by Jim Gindin

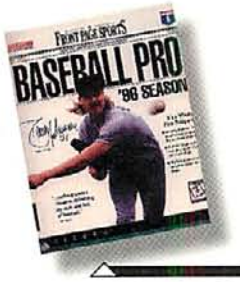
In Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous short story "The Artist of the Beautiful," a watchmaker recreates nature in the form of a flawless butterfly. I hate to spoil a good ending, but since the story is almost 150 years old, well, the mechanical butterfly ends up being crushed by a child. The creation of the pretty perpetual motion machine demonstrated the value and beauty of nature, but the effort itself was impractical, vain and too delicate to survive.

Which brings us to Front Page Sports Baseball Pro '96, Sierra's attempt to recreate the game of baseball from the physics on up. Like the company's award-winning FPS Football series, this is an innovative game—even if most of the innovation was introduced when the game debuted in 1994. FPSBB attempts to simulate organizational development, career play and every aspect of the on-field action. These are worthy goals, and Sierra, through its acquisition of the Dynamix programming lab, has attempted as much as any sports game producer ever has.

FPSBB '96 is, in fact, more like real baseball than any game previously released. Taken out of context, that sounds like a ringing endorsement. It isn't. The FPSBB '96 that reached store shelves is more representative of Hawthorne's crushed mechanical butterfly. It's too delicate to stay running very long; it's much too slow and buggy; and it just isn't terribly entertaining. What could have been the ultimate baseball simulation is, instead, a major league disappointment.



GATESBALL Front Page Sports Baseball Pro's interface has been completely redesigned for Windows 95. Remember, Winston, this is a good thing.



Price: $44.95
System Requirements: 486DX66 processor (Pentium 90 recommended), 8 MB RAM (for Windows 95) or 12 MB RAM (for Windows 3.1), sound card with DAC, SVGA 640x480 and 256 colors, 2x CD-ROM, 26 MB hard drive space, mouse.
Protection: None (CD must be in drive for full sound or partial installations)
Designer: Dynamix
Publisher: Sierra On-Line Inc.
Bellevue, WA
(206) 649-9800
Reader Service #: 329

STOP MAKING SENSE

Virtually nothing in Front Page Sports Baseball Pro '96 works as it should; every module fails under close analysis. Unlike most other baseball sims, FPSBB does not rate players from statistics. Instead, hitters are provided with numerical ratings in contact hitting, speed and power hitting, while pitchers are rated on such attributes as control and proficiency at throwing certain pitches. When you're drafting a player, those attributes are all you see. In spring training, you can allocate different percentages of each player's effort into developing his various attributes. You can thus build a team of ballplayers from the ground up or tweak an existing team to fit your personality. Want to see Ken Griffey, Jr., go for .400? Abandon power hitting and defensive ability development and pour all his training into contact hitting.

This is a wonderfully entertaining concept, and the ratings themselves are nicely blended with the training percentages and ages of the players. It doesn't necessarily

Roach Motel

We can't list all the bugs in the shipping version of FPSBB 96, because Sierra's own bug list is a three-page single-spaced document. So here's our Top Five:

1. A World Series that only lasts one game.
2. Fielders are sometimes unable to pick up the ball.
3. Players with "out"-class injuries are allowed to keep playing.
4. Position players pitch too often.
5. Pitch indicator shows green when pitch is not a strike.







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- 20 man rosters require most of your players to play both offense and defense. Get ready to use Dan Marino as a defensive back or Junior Seau at running back!
- The football is larger and harder to throw. Do you take a chance on the pass or grind it out with a running attack?



- Rules favor the running game.
- Goal posts were placed in the front of the end zone. The "Post" pattern was commonly used to run defenders into the posts for an easy touch-down reception.



- Play a little rougher on the receivers. You can hit them anywhere on the field until the ball is thrown... and it's all legal!
- Players like Dick Butkus ruled the gridiron, paving the way for the modern day player.



All the NFL teams and players from four legendary eras of football: 1996, 1968, 1950, and 1932!

Incredible 3D graphics

Advanced A.I. with team specific styles and coaching strategies

Intense multi-player action using the Gravis Grip Multi-player adapter

"Time Travel" with teams to create fantasy matchups

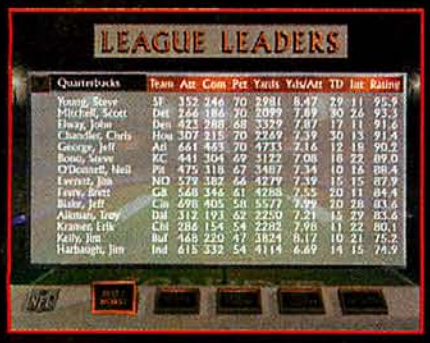
Action and Coach Mode play

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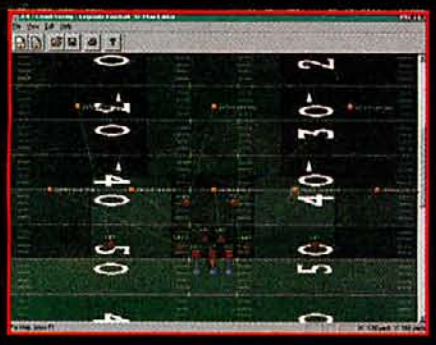


THE GREAT MODERN

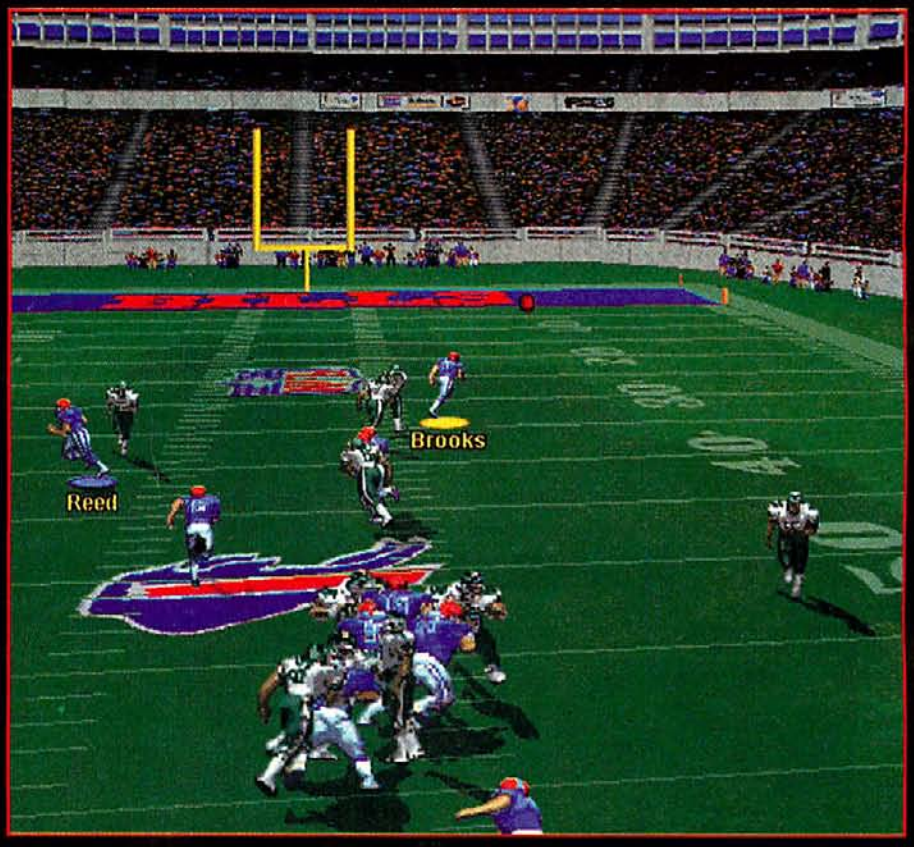
"...the freshest premise of any computer football game in years... Beautiful SVGA graphics and solid gameplay," Computer Gaming World



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translate into better ballplayers, however, and it's very difficult to determine exactly why. Some players with top-notch ratings simply don't perform well, while those with average ratings end up leading leagues. Ultimately, you have to ignore the ratings and concentrate solely on performance.

FPSBB's stats basically leave a lot to be desired. There simply isn't much differentiation between the good and bad players. The best can come from unpredictable places, too. In my first full season, Pittsburgh outfielder Mike Kingery led the league in slugging percentage (.581), hit 25 home runs and was second in on-base percentage. This despite posting a .411 slugging percentage in hitter-friendly Colorado in real-life 1995 and never hitting more than nine home runs in a long career.



PRIME RATES FPSBB eschews a standard statistical model for numerical player ratings in numerous offensive and defensive categories.

Thirty-five-year-old ballplayers don't suddenly post MVP-caliber seasons out of nowhere, especially after leaving the best hitter's park in baseball history.

Even aside from Kingery, the numbers produced aren't very baseball-like. All but the weakest two or three hitters manage more than 10 home runs in a season, but almost no one gets more than 35 to 40. All but the slowest steal at least 10 to 15 bases, but nobody steals more than 40 to 50. Top-rated outfielders, who normally make about three putouts per game, rarely catch more than 100 fly balls in a complete season.

On the pitching side, even the greatest pitcher of this generation, Greg Maddux, is often mediocre, despite having top-notch ratings–including a 100 mph fastball that leaves his real-life 88 mph heater in the dust. The game pays little attention to individual walk and strikeout totals, giving everyone pretty much the same results. Maddux has the best control rating, yet walked more than four batters every nine innings–very near the bottom of the list. A little unpredictability is nice. Complete abandonment of baseball common sense is infuriating.

MOON SHOT

To make matters worse, this game grinds through its simulations as if it's trying to calculate the exact parameters of a space flight to Mars. FPSBB takes days to simulate a complete season, whereas most of its competitors can do the same in an hour or less, with much more realistic results. In the best pure simulations, league totals will be fairly close to normal league totals, and the variations among players will show a deviation from average similar to that in real life. In FPSBB, neither is true.

FPSBB spends about a half-hour on a Pentium 75 just to churn out the physics of every baseball put in play for a single day. Your hard drive will sound like it's grating cheese, while all you can do is watch television or read a book (I'd recommend Hawthorne's stories, or maybe *War and Peace*). Yet virtually any other game on the market will give you more interesting numbers in a hundredth of the time.

Team management is an equally frustrating endeavor. You

Patch Work

In the years I've been reviewing and enjoying sports simulation software, I've never seen such a negative reaction to the release of a game as that of FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL PRO '96. One center of public discussion, the Usenet newsgroup **comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.sports**, featured missive after missive denouncing Sierra for releasing this product in its original bug-ridden condition.

Sierra President Ken Williams, to his credit, threw himself into the discussion. But his comments, which included getting the name of the game wrong, were more troubling than helpful: "FPS: Baseball 97 [sic] is one of the finest products Sierra has ever shipped and deserves the success it is already seeing," Williams wrote. "There are certainly improvements that we will make in the years ahead, but I am 100 percent confident that essentially all of you who buy this product are going to be VERY pleased." Soon after, however, Sierra announced that a major patch would be released in mid August that would attempt to fix the game's most glaring errors. (On August 15th, the day this story went to press, Sierra announced that the patch would be delayed indefinitely.)

I was able to briefly examine version 1.09.1 of the promised patch. It seemed Dynamix programmers listened to user complaints, although I can't be sure how close this patch will be to the "real" one. They focused on making the game engine more usable, and while problems remain, the early patch is an improvement.

The Swing window that rendered the hitting interface laughable is gone. To help guide batters, pitches within the strike zone are green and pitches outside the strike zone are red. Batting is now an exercise in timing and color recognition. Since you still have to select the location of your swing before the pitch, it makes no sense at all to select any area but the middle of the plate. You're not going to hit anything thrown to the top or bottom of the strike zone, but the simulation is much more generous about awarding contact with a pitch.

There are still far too many foul balls, and fielders still drop way too many pop-ups, but dozens of problems have been fixed, including the bug that made runners seriously overrun bases while advancing on a hit. Troubles with simulation accuracy have yet to be addressed, but at least the much-hyped, but previously absent post-season awards are now in the game. However, simulation speed is still slower than a series of Charlie Hough knuckleballs.

The beta patch at least makes FPSBB playable, and hopefully a final patch will be in your hands by the time you read this.



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Circle Reader Service #284



SUIT YOURSELF The graphics are the best thing about FPSBB. You can customize the look of your team until they're as pretty as you are.

can set lineups and pitching rotations, but when it's left to simulate, FPSBB shows little understanding of the game. Your starters play every game unless injured, and there's no way to designate backups. It's not unusual for a player to be on the roster all 180 days of a season and have three at-bats during that time. Some pitchers get abused as well, repeatedly brought in for relief work even though they're solely listed in the starting rotation. Andy Ashby of the Padres, for instance, started 34 games in my inaugural season and relieved in 60 others. (To FPSBB's credit, he went from his usual All-Star-like numbers to a league-high 6.44 ERA.) Finally, the game has a tendency to put outfielders on the pitcher's mound in close games. Pittsburgh's Jacob Brumfield and Los Angeles's Karim Garcia were both among the league save leaders. Garcia was actually the Dodgers' best reliever, posting a 3.40 ERA in 54 innings.

NO-HITTER

All of these complaints could be ignored if Sierra had at least put out a good arcade game. I wish I could say this is the case. Unfortunately, as an action game, FPSBB exhibits tremendous potential but remains fatally flawed. This is a Windows 95–style game, with a series of separate windows handling the SVGA batter-pitcher interface, defensive play and player information. You can customize your playing environment by resizing and moving windows. The game allows several levels of pitching, hitting, base-running and fielding, ranging from automatic to impossible to inconceivable.

Creating windows is very expensive from a system resources perspective, and nowhere is that more apparent than in the batting interface. In real baseball, you have about one-quarter of a second to decide whether to swing, where to swing and how hard to swing a bat. In FPSBB, you can choose the direction and how hard to swing before the pitch is thrown. The pitcher then delivers the ball, and you press a button to begin the swing, timing it to connect with the pitch. Graphically, this is done very well. The pitch arrives quickly, with a realistic flight path. Just as you're ready to swing, however, FPSBB starts to draw a Swing window on the screen, and by the time it's

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finished, it's too late to hit the ball. Hitting, therefore, requires that you anticipate this window when you begin the swing. There's no opportunity to evaluate the pitch, and you've already determined the placement of your swing.

FPSBB isn't very generous about granting contact with a thrown ball, either. Most pitches simply can't be hit, no matter how lucky you are with swing placement. It's a pretty interface, but poorly implemented. Unless you instruct the program to throw all pitches to the center of the strike zone, you will frequently suffer entire games without a hit.

The fielding interface has been completely changed from FPSBB '94. When contact is made, a fielding window pops up on the screen. Stick-like fielders move after the ball as it's in flight. Despite the advanced physics model used, there's little perspective on the main window. So fielding involves trying to guide the nearest defender to a shrinking circle that estimates where the ball will touch ground. When balls are hit into the outfield, the angle of view renders the main window useless. You need to use a tiny top-view window to guide the fielder dot toward the touchdown dot. If this sounds entertaining, I can suggest some '70s Atari console games you might like.

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL WAIT (FOR THE PATCH)

Aside from the numerous playability problems, FRONT PAGE SPORTS BASEBALL PRO '96 looks terrific. There are carefully textured and detailed representations of every Major League ballpark, and the pitches and batters look great.

In a time when game designers release so many titles utterly lacking in inspiration or imagination, it's painful to have to criticize Sierra heavily for a title that promised so much. But despite the designers' noblest intentions, the bottom line is this: As released, prematurely, by Sierra, this product is nothing short of a bug-ridden disaster. Sure, with patches the game may eventually prove to be great, but why should gamers have to put up with that? We don' need no stinkin' patches. After shelling out $45 for a baseball simulation, is it asking too much to be able to play it out of the box without suffering through such atrocities as a one-game World Series?

Say it ain't so, Sierra.

APPEAL: For those who simply must have every baseball game released.

PROS: Nice graphics, interesting player-attribute model.

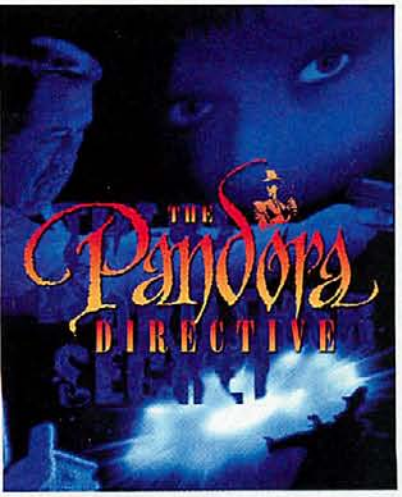
CONS: Unrealistic statistics, butt-slow simulations and a locust-like plague of bugs sadly brings this once-promising title to its knees.

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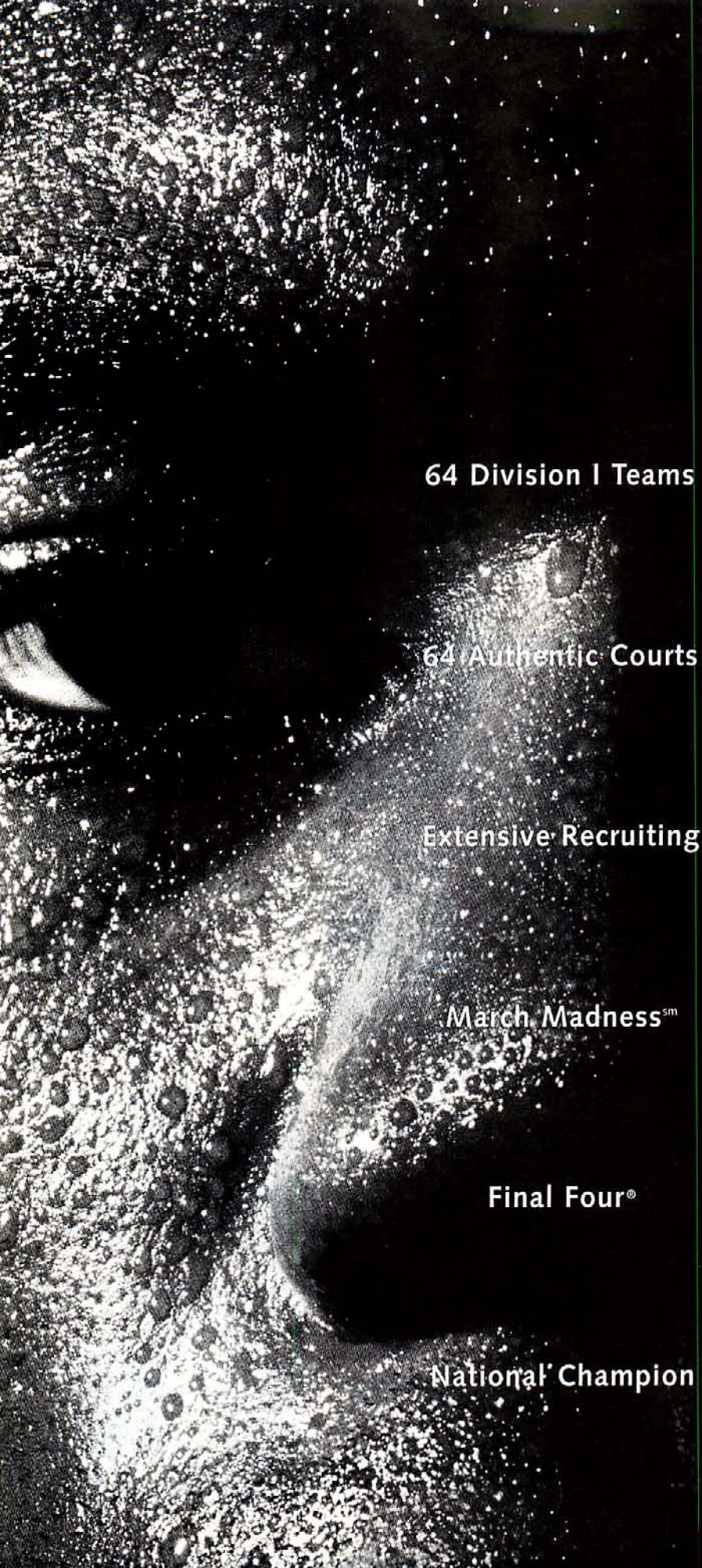
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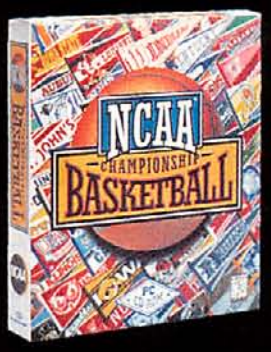
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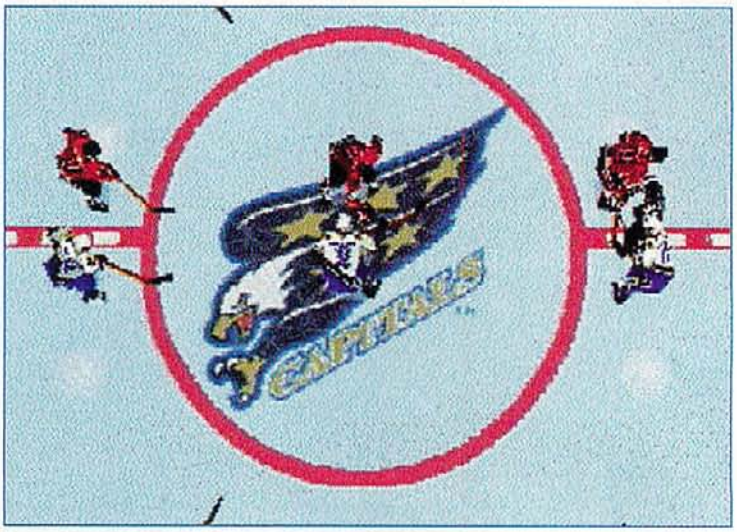
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Ice Breaker

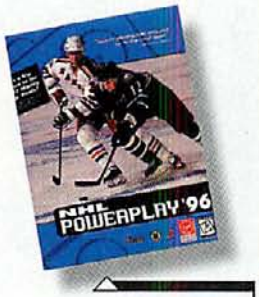
NHL POWERPLAY '96 Offers Low-Res, High-Energy Thrills

by Tasos Kaiafas

Hockey is so aggressive and fast paced that even professional, human cameramen can't keep up with the puck all the time. In a computer sim, a wildly panning camera controlled by an algorithm is not equipped to do a better job—not yet, anyway. So it's a relief and a pleasure that Virgin Interactive Entertainment's NHL POWERPLAY '96 bucks that trendiest of new computer sports features—the careening, out-of-control virtual 3D camera—and concentrates instead on good, solid gameplay.



PUCKER UP Powerplay's graphics may not excite, but the on-ice action is fast and furious.



Price: $29.95
System Requirements: IBM-compatible 486DX/66 processor, Windows 95, 8 MB RAM, 5 MB hard drive space (15 MB recommended), 2x CD-ROM (4x recommended), 1 MB video RAM. Supports Gravis GrIP.
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Radical Entertainment
Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
Irvine, CA
(714) 833-8710
Reader Service #: 330

THE SPECTATOR'S SEAT

NHL POWERPLAY '96 uses a straightforward, old-fashioned, back-and-forth scrolling approach, with no additional perspectives to choose from. Though some gamers might bemoan this lack of choice, I applaud it. Unlike many other sports titles, EA's NHL 96 included, you can at least play POWERPLAY without ever losing your focus.

Although there are some coaching options and play calling, POWERPLAY plays much better as an action game than as a coaching game for stat-heads. That said, the game does have great depth of control, as the players on ice actually appear to have some fundamental knowledge of the sport. They may not be brilliant, but more often than not they'll be in the right place at the right time and do what is expected of them. In this respect, it actually mimics a real hockey game even better than NHL 96.

Ability ratings are more than just cosmetic, but actually affect your players' performance. You can clearly observe a teammate's checking ability and speed, and other strengths and weaknesses; some have a strong slap shot, while others have a quicker wrist shot. It really makes a difference to your success knowing what the player with the puck can do.

Your team's rating will also affect your degree of success. If you take a fairly well-rated team into the playoffs, you'll notice that—regardless of your own proficiency in the game—you can get through the early rounds much easier than you can later rounds against a higher-ranked team. There are times, however, where a good team will dominate a lesser team to an unrealistic extreme. I played one game where I won 93 percent of the face-offs and kept the puck in their zone for the better part of the contest.

With the Gravis GrIP, Powerplay has the versatility of control that console sports games, particularly on the Playstation, have had for some time. With seven buttons, you can make moves that used to require a simultaneous two-button push, something I could never get used to. In addition to the standard pass-and-shoot action, the GrIP lets you do dump, drop and flip passes, as well as skate backwards. Although I like NHL 96's double-click control, Powerplay's controls are much more straightforward and easier to grasp.

A FAN WITHOUT THE FANFARE

NHL POWERPLAY '96's lack of 3D graphics and even a hi-res SVGA option—almost unheard of in other current games—is bound to turn off some gamers. But to judge the game properly, you need to look beyond the fluff, pick up a gamepad and play through a couple games, for this is a great example of how a game does not have to make your eyes pop out of your head to be enjoyable and entertaining. NHL POWERPLAY '96 is furiously paced hockey that should satisfy the animal in any hockey fan.

APPEAL: Sports gamers who like their hockey fast and violent with some element of realism.

PROS: Versatile and intuitive game control, especially with the Gravis GrIP; fast-paced action with lots of checking; satisfactory AI and play-calling.

CONS: Behind-the-times graphics without even SVGA support cause pixilated players and lackluster visuals. An unrealistic action level and lack of managerial options could make hockey purists scoff at the gameplay and sneer at the lack of depth.

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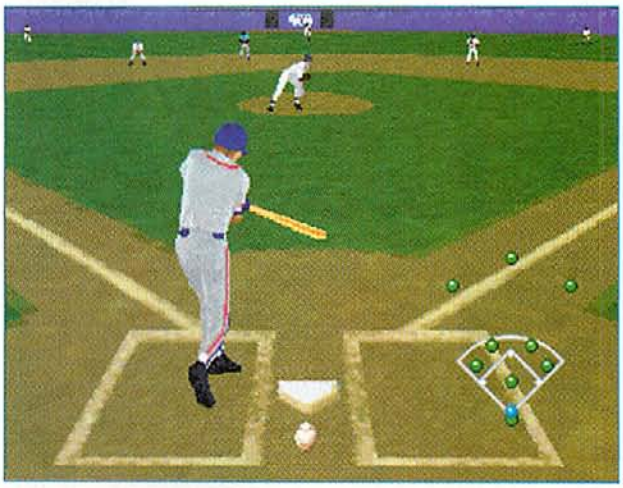
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Hurts So Bad

FRANK THOMAS "BIG HURT" BASEBALL Can't Compete With The Big Boys

by Dennis McCauley



HURT ME With BIG HURT's easy batting module, you'll be smacking the ball just as well as the great White Sox first baseman himself.

This year is shaping up as an historic one for computer baseball sims, with a number of big-league releases providing gamers with more roundball action than ever before. It's too bad that when the list of noteable games is compiled, Acclaim's FRANK THOMAS "BIG HURT" BASEBALL will be just a distant memory. That's because, in the midst of a hot pennant race for the title of best baseball sim, BIG HURT is strictly a non-contender.

BIG HURT offers exhibition, All Star, regular season and playoff options, as well as a home run derby module. Sounds impressive, but when you start the game you'll find that you're basically playing a video game rather than the kind of sophisticated baseball sim computer players are used to. Don't get me wrong, there's nothing intrinsically bad about arcade-oriented titles. It's just that today's top games provide substantial league, player and statistical management capabilities in addition to the field action. Once you've moved outside the foul lines, however, Acclaim's offering has little to offer.

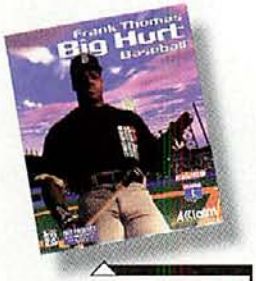
THE TAN MONSTER

BIG HURT has acceptable graphics, but they really don't equal the best of the competition. The game's stadium renditions are ordinary at best, inaccurate at worst. Fenway Park's famous left-field wall, for example, known as the Green Monster, has mutated, chameleon-like, into a tan creature in BIG HURT. Other stadium graphics range from unremarkable to dreary. Player graphics, however, are conveniently large and have some nice movements, such as pitchers mopping their brow before getting set, and batters cocking the lumber as they dig in at the plate.

On the mound, you select your pitch and its speed and location. BIG HURT is fairly accurate in this respect, and it's not too difficult to master. It seems almost too easy to throw strikes, though, even for pitchers who aren't noted for their control. Batting is also easy. Perhaps in keeping with the slugging power of the game's namesake, balls fly out of the park with ease. Tape-measure home runs are the norm, and 500-foot moon shots are not uncommon. OK, they happen in real life, too, but the 478 and 523 footers Roberto Alomar jacked out of Camden Yards and Tiger Stadium, respectively, were a bit much.

What really puts the hurt (sorry!) on this game is what's missing. Most importantly, there's no all-computer mode. If you want a game's results, you'll have to play it yourself. That, my friends, is the kiss of death for seasonal replays. Although BIG HURT does offer 26- and 52-game options along with the standard 162 game season, they're all rather pointless, even if you care to invest the time. Why? Because there are no league-wide statistics. You can only get the stats from your own team, and even then they are presented in butt-ugly fashion, four categories per screen, with no printout available. For the sake of tracking league standings, the computer will determine winners and losers of games you're not involved in, but it apparently keeps no stats, or at least does not make them available. This means there are no league leaders, no record-shattering performances, little to root for and zero excitement. It's as if BIG HURT's designers understood the mechanics of baseball, but not its statistical soul.

The bottom line on this game is that it simply can't compete. It does nothing better than today's other baseball games, and lags behind in several key areas. In another time and place, the game might not be considered so bad. But in the Year of the Baseball Sim, BIG HURT strikes out.



Price: $44.99
System Requirements: IBM-compatible Pentium 75 processor, 8 MB RAM, 5 MB hard drive space (30 MB recommended), MS-DOS 5.0 or greater, 1 MB VESA-compatible SVGA graphics card, 2x CD-ROM (4x recommended), gamepad and sound card recommended. Supports Gravis GrIP.
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Iguana Entertainment
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment, Inc. Glen Cove, NY (516) 656-5000
Reader Service #: 332

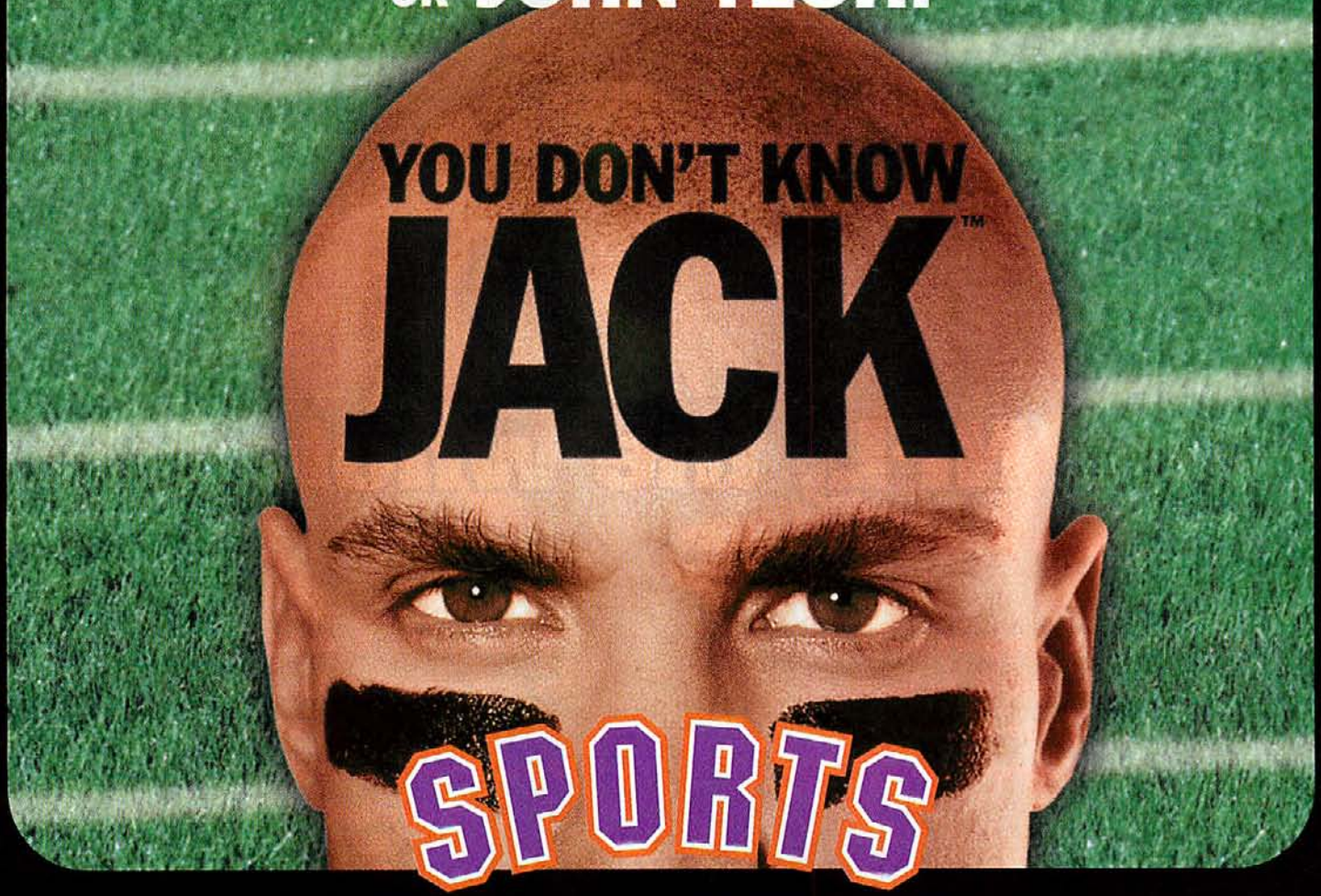
APPEAL: Fans of arcade baseball action who value ease of play over complex league and stat-management utilities.

PROS: Good player graphics with realistic moves; easy batting and pitching mechanics.

CONS: Minimalist approach to stats, nonexistent player management capabilities and weak AI.

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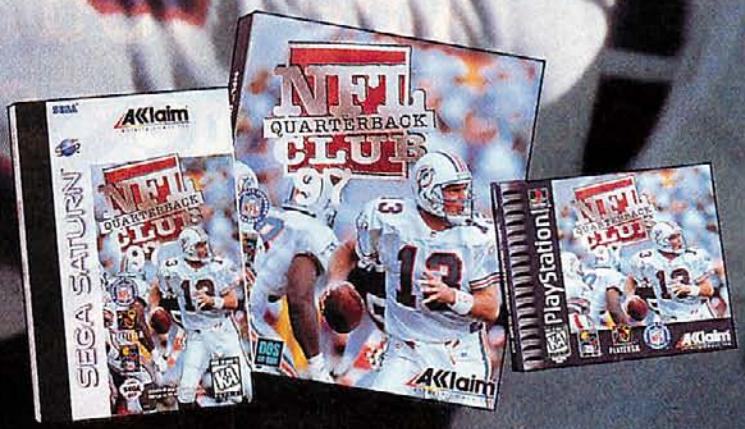


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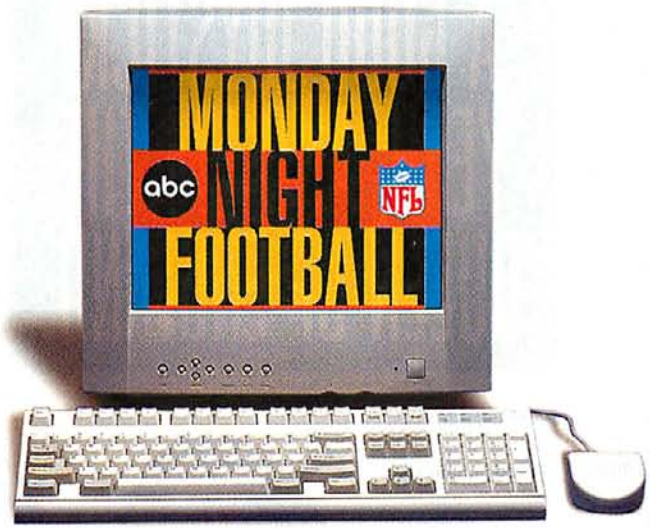
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Circle Reader Service #54

It seems like everyone these days is throwing together some plastic handles with a few buttons and passing them off as joysticks. But I'm a serious gamer. When I want a joystick, I look for a real one. From CH Products.



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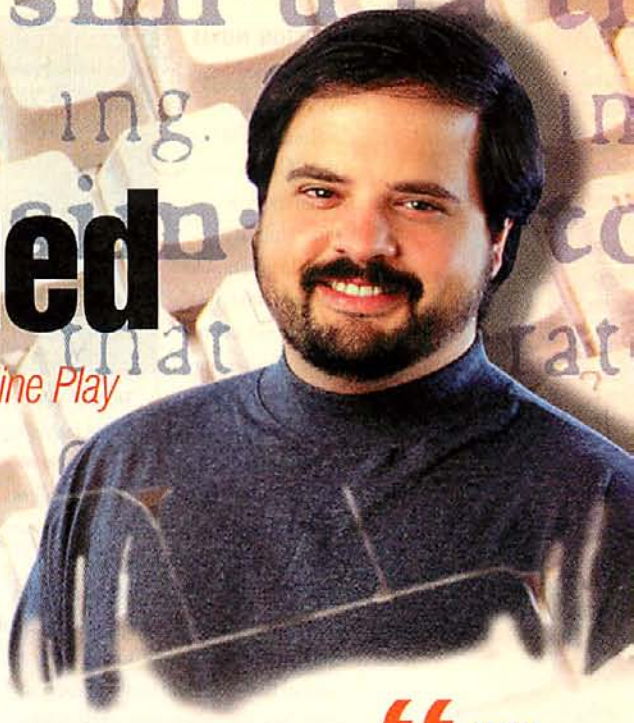
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Circle Reader Service #60

EF2000 Supercharged

Re-engining The EuroFighter For Win 95 And Online Play



Digital Image Design (DID) just can't leave a good program alone. The company is on the verge of releasing a major enhancement pack for EF2000, as well as a version for Windows 95. Both breathe new life into one of the best simulations of 1995.

SUPERCHARGED

EF2000 set the current standard for PC flight sims when it was released last winter, but it wasn't perfect. By the time the third patch (version 2.02) was released, though, the program was clearly good enough to earn a *CGW* Premier Award.

Now DID is taking the sim a step further with the EF2000 TACTCOM (Tactical Communications) add-on. The "Tactical" refers to the new mission planner capabilities, while "Communications" refers to numerous new multiplayer options. Add to that a number of tweaks and improvements to the simulation engine, and you'll find the biggest decision isn't whether to purchase the add-on but in which form to buy it.

TACTCOM is an add-on disc for the DOS version of EF2000. It incorporates all the fixes included in the 2.02 patch, as well as the new multiplayer and mission-planning capabilities. But you may want to instead look at SUPER EF2000. This is a Windows 95 port of EF2000 that includes all the capabilities of the original package and has TACTCOM built in. Functionally they're identical. TACTCOM will be less expensive, but SUPER EF2000 will let Win 95 users play without rebooting.

> **"With modem play, a mission planner and dozens of tweaks, EF2000 is finally fully realized."**

ON THE RADAR

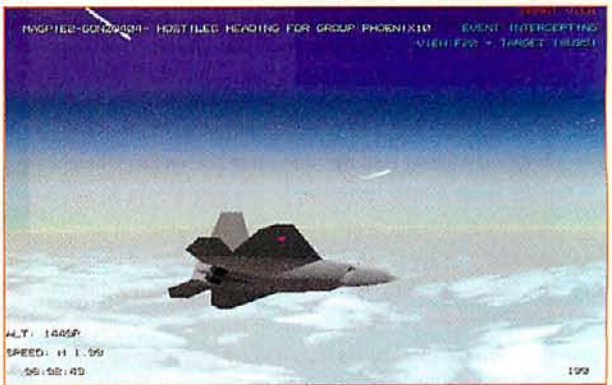
Paul Grace, Brent Iverson, and the rest of the San Mateo contingent of Jane's Combat Simulations have been working hard on the final two products based on the US NAVY FIGHTERS simulation engine.

The first to hit the shelves will be NATO FIGHTERS, an expansion disc for ADVANCED TACTICAL FIGHTERS. The F-16, Saab Gripen, Sukhoi Su-35 and EuroFighter 2000 will be added to the flyable stable in ATF. Also on tap are new weapons, including backfiring missiles and cluster bombs, Jane's reference data on the new aircraft, and an all-new 40-mission Baltic campaign.



US NAVY FIGHTERS 97

More exciting is US NAVY FIGHTERS 97, slated for release in October. This Windows 95 port of USNF takes the battle to Vietnam, where you'll be able to fly the F-8 Crusader, F-4 Phantom II, MiG-17, and MiG-21 on 25 missions based on actual naval air operations in the Vietnam War. The network and modem play from ATF has been retrofitted into this version of USNF. The Jane's connection brings 35 minutes of video, as well as photos and technical data. Along with the Vietnam missions, you'll also find all the original USNF and MARINE FIGHTERS aircraft and campaigns.



VIEW TO A KILL The new tactical view lets you keep an eye on the combat going on around you.

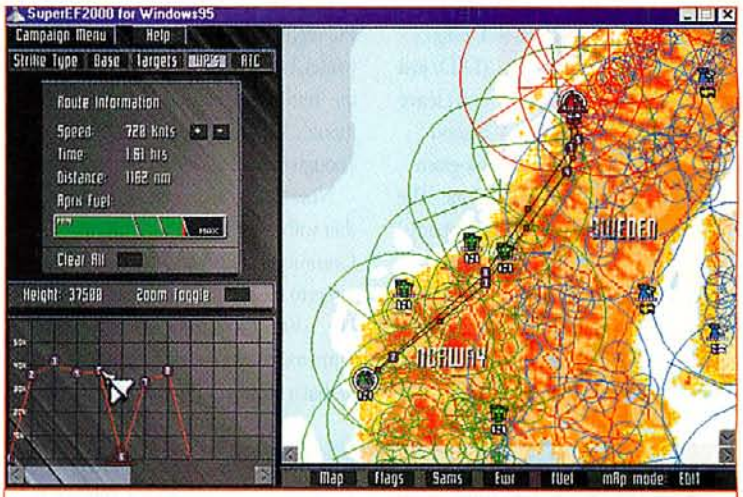
MISSION MOXIE

With the Mission Planner feature, EF2000's WARGEN campaign mode is finally fully realized. In addition to pregenerated missions, you can now design your own. Available in both single-player and multiplayer campaign modes, the Mission Planner allows you to choose the type of target you want to attack, what hardware you'll use to attack it and the waypoints and altitudes to use for ingress and egress. You can even assign individual targets (such as hangars, control towers and oil tanks) to each aircraft. Numerous new map options let you view terrain contours, radar coverage, and SAM ranges so you can better plot your waypoints.

Depending on the mission structure, you can also choose up to four different aircraft types for a mission. For instance, you might assign Tornadoes to take out SAM sites, F-117s for an initial strike, your flight of EF2000s for a second strike, and F-22s as fighter escort. At some points in the campaign, the WARGEN mission generator may hog all the available aircraft, and you might have to fly a few canned missions before you can again use the Mission Generator.



TARGET SHOPPERS You can now assign specific targets to individual planes in your flight.



MISSION: PLOTTABLE The new Mission Planner lets you set targets and flight makeup. Radar and SAM coverage are shown, so you can set the safest possible waypoints.

SOLO FLIGHT

Another welcome addition is the Custom Air-To-Air mission generator. Here you can enter air-to-air combat (fully armed or guns-only) with any of the aircraft in EF2000. Select altitude, location (glacier, fjord, city, etc.), time, weather, and difficulty, as well as who has the element of surprise. Then choose zero to seven wingmen and up to four types of aircraft to battle, with as many as six of each model in the air. Practice gunnery on easy-target An-225s, or take on 24 F-22s, if you have a death wish.

And of course, there's the multiplayer mode. In addition to network play, the updated version supports modem and (in the TACTCOM version) direct serial connections. There are more options here, including team play and base defense.

In addition, you'll find a number of new views, the best of which is Smart-View. Hit Shift-V and you'll be treated to an external view of the nearest action, whether it's a dogfight or a ground strike. No more scrolling through 30 planes sitting on the ground to find some activity. And those of you who were pummeled by the super-accurate enemy aircraft in early patches will appreciate the new skill-level settings. Some might find it annoying to have to spend money on features that arguably should have been in the first release. To its credit, DID has addressed the deficiencies and bugs of the original EF2000 with free patches. TACTCOM adds significant new capabilities and incorporates dozens of user suggestions. It's well worth the small investment to revitalize this excellent sim.

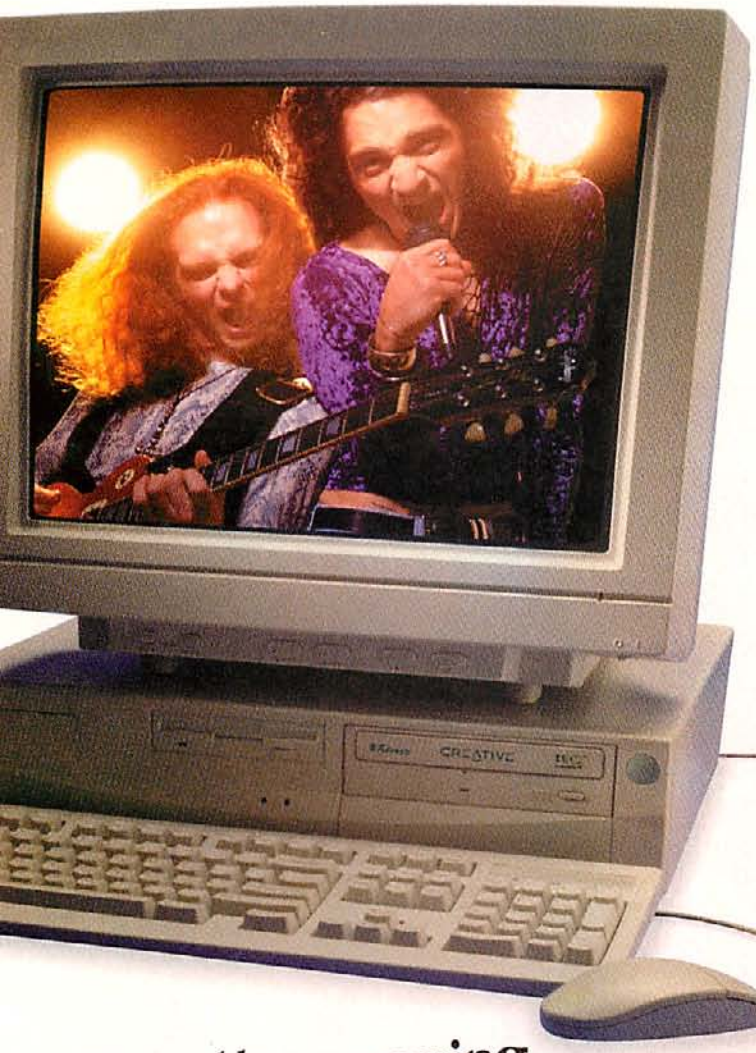
CG TIPS!

▸EF2000 (with 2.02 patch) Getting too close to a seaborne target can be suicide, as ships tend to be very well equipped with SAM batteries. The best way to take out a ship is to run in at about 400 feet above the water to avoid radar detection. As you near a point 70 nautical miles from the target, kick in the afterburner to increase your speed. Once past 70nm (the max range of the Sea Eagle radar), pop up to 2,000 feet. Use the C key to cycle targets, checking the Zoom function of the left radar MFD to ensure you've targeted the proper ship. Once you've launched the missiles (use both missiles on one target, as the Sea Eagle hit percentage isn't that great), immediately turn 180 degrees, drop back below 500 feet, and check your DASS warning system for incoming missiles. The Sea Eagle has its own guidance, so once it's on its way, your job is done.



Sea Eagle Radar

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Then the chanting begins. "A-W-E...A-W-E...A-W-E."

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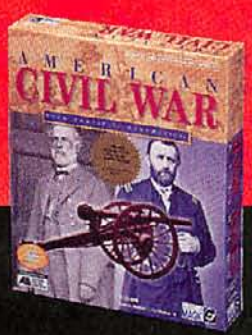
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So Little Time

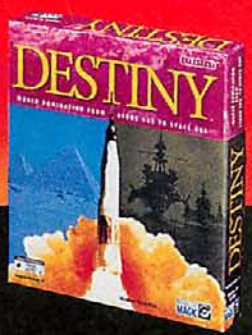
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Circle Reader Service #172

Moody Blues

PRIVATEER 2 Combines A Slick, Futuristic Look With A Good Story And Real Stars

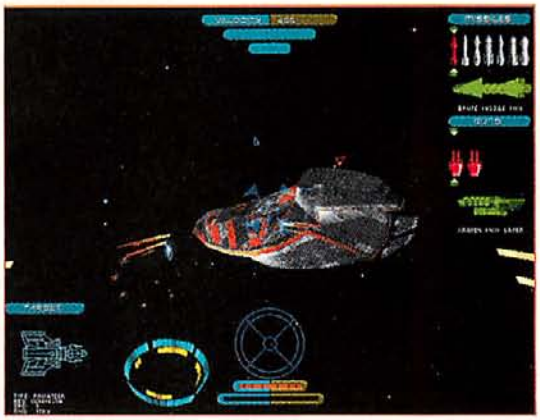
by Terry Coleman

SNEAK PREVIEW
GAME STILL IN DEVELOPMENT

For those of us destined to spend our entire lives planet-bound, the skies mean a warm shade of azure blue, the familiar atmosphere of fluffy clouds, winds, and rain that gravity traps to surround and protect our fragile world. But space—deep space—is cold and dark and lonely. And in the aptly named PRIVATEER 2: THE DARKENING, the heavens are frighteningly beautiful vistas of midnight blue, broken only occasionally by the glint of distant suns, the faint glow of a reflective moon, or the bright flash of a space vessel being destroyed by pirates. The space "roads" you travel are long indeed, and despite 2000 years of technological development in the mostly peaceful Irrulan, Isaac and Hom systems, humans have barely put a dent in the vastness of the cosmos. So, if you've ever felt that the universe could go on with its business just fine, neither knowing nor caring about the puny goings-on of humanity, this is your game.

GREETINGS, SER

Outwardly, the two millennia of peace should have brought prosperity to all the inhabitants of the three star systems. But the DARKENING universe is Machiavellian through and through. There are the subtle naming conventions, such as "Ser" for "Sir." Even the mane of Lev Arris, your character, would be perfectly at home in a Renaissance novel about the Medicis. But it's the vast web of conspiracy that distinguishes this cosmos. Corruption abounds, from the ruthless CI5 secret police (think James Bond's MI5 run by old Niccolo himself), to the Kindred, a powerful galactic group of racketeers, murderers and thieves that combine the worst qualities of the Mafia and the Borgias. These two leviathans struggle over legitimate trade routes, black market profits, even control of governments.



WHEN DARKNESS FALLS Space is the perfect backdrop for the cockpit view of THE DARKENING. Everything from the weapons loadout to shield/armor status to the streams of laser-induced death are easily discerned at a glance.

Into this tangle of deceit, intrigue and double-cross, you awake as Lev Arris, deprived of your memory, your ship, your friends, the whole of your life–only knowing that you survived the crash of a star freighter by ejecting in a lifepod. While you are in the hospital convalescing, agents from both the CI5 and the Kindred come to collect you. In the ensuing firefight, you are stunned and sent off in an autopiloted starship, while many of the doctors and nurses who cared for you are ruthlessly slaughtered.

WHAT JUSTICE?

Now a man on the run, you must make your living on the outskirts of the law, with little more than a few credits and a blaster at your hip. Shady connections can get you laser cannon for your ship at a low cost, food of questionable origin, and escort missions where you're better off not knowing the true identity of your passengers. Wingmen will escort your cargo, sometimes at bargain prices, and will just as likely betray you to the Kindred or the military for a few extra credits. Dealing in legitimate cargo is relatively safe, but slow. Selling firearms on planets embroiled in civil war is a hair-trigger road to riches...and a magnet for the CI5.

Still, there are gray areas where you can trade quite profitably. There's always someone willing to buy a nerve toxin to poison an enemy or some illicit body parts to lengthen their life, or someone who needs some cut-rate Cerulean gemstones to fill out their jewel collection. Like the legendary pirates of the Caribbean, you soon develop a sixth sense of where to trade lumber and Bex beer and where to sell illegal pleasure borgs.

If the trading aspects were all there was to the game, it would be interesting but nothing special. Set in the WING COMMANDER universe, however, DARKENING promises a lot of spaceship combat, and it certainly delivers. The ships are even better than those of WING IV: artfully shaded, dark and deadly, they look perfect next to the moody, murky depths of the galaxy.



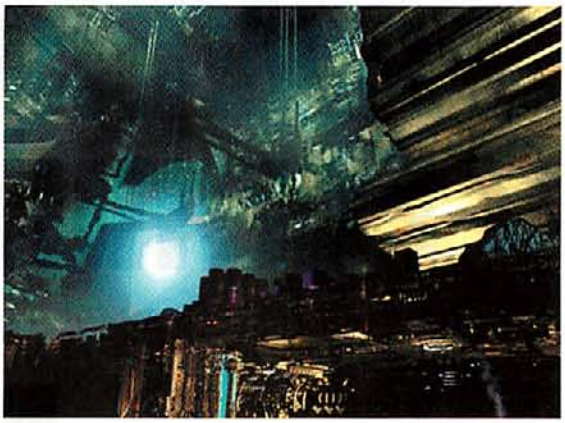
There are fast cutter ships that let you flee at the first sign of trouble, medium ships with better shields and power, and heavy vessels capable of standing up to a military destroyer.

The missions themselves involve more than just deciding on a trade route. You may have to rescue a diplomat stranded in an ejection pod deep in space, salvage the cargo from a damaged vessel, or smuggle medical supplies to rebels on a war-torn planet. You may even ignore the plot of the game entirely, and go on a SID MEIER'S PIRATES–like trading and privateering spree for hours on end.

But to get the full impact of the game, you owe it to yourself to dive headfirst into the interwoven complexities of the story line. It's a good mystery yarn, as Lev must discover exactly how his life as a privateer fits into the schemes of the Kindred and the CIS. Are they both really trying to kill him, and if so, why? What connection, if any, did he have with these nefarious organizations in his previous life? Who is the beautiful woman whose face haunts him, dancing at the edge of his memory? As Lev struggles to find answers, the game nicely parallels his search for his past. The clever and sometimes surprising plot twists jog Lev's memory: You learn things about yourself (as Lev) that you must come to grips with to successfully finish the game.



THE LIGHT THAT BLINDS The explosions of the detailed ships are impressive indeed, as are the magnificent light-source-shaded ships themselves.



CUT ME

The cinematic cut scenes are even better than in WING COMMANDER III and IV, with several top-notch actors—John Hurt, David Warner, Christopher Walken, among others—chewing up the scenery with relish as they advance the plot. Many games (and films for that matter) have tried to out-do *Blade Runner*. DARKENING is the first that effectively combines a slick, futuristic look with the tense, otherworldly atmosphere so necessary to a believable sci-fi setting. On the world of Bex, for example, dirigibles are the main mode of transportation, because the religious sect that settled the planet didn't want to pollute its beautiful countryside. The same planet, moreover, was also settled by a group of scientists who had difficulty adjusting to the religious lifestyle of the monks. Their way of dealing with the situation was to do alcohol research, resulting in the widely renowned Bex beer.

Almost all the planets have similar tensions. There are antiknowledge cyberpunks who'll kill you if they catch you reading a book (we don't know if CGW counts), and planets where you can be arrested for eating or selling real meat. The fact that you can trade such "illegal" items on these planets shows that the various worlds are well thought out, with rich histories and vibrant, active populations. Every world, every character you meet has its own special agenda—which makes DARKENING a wild ride indeed. If you survive the attacks of rival privateers, you'll have to outrun the military patrols. Then you'll no doubt run smack into a group of cyborgs who've vowed to annihilate humanity. Assuming you survive that, you may find that your nonillegal cargo is subject to confiscation by corrupt local officials. And just how did you get such a extensive reputation, when no one can tell you anything about who you really are? PRIVATEER 2: THE DARKENING may seem at times to offer more questions than answers, but like life two millennia in the future, it's a scintillating journey, regardless of the solution you seek.

Need A Used Ship, Buddy?



Joe the Bartender (John Hurt), will gladly help you find "bargains" once you've achieved enough notoriety.



Ships are more advanced (and expensive) than in WING IV, but this time the Confed government isn't providing them.



Weapons, on the other hand, are pretty affordable—especially the Banshee missile, fondly called the "shield buster."



And don't ignore the news bulletins; they often contain tips on new weapons and tactics.

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

CG CHOICE

A Winning Formula

GRAND PRIX II Leaps To The Front Of The Racing Pack

by Gordon Goble

Ever since the original WORLD CIRCUIT sent virtual drivers hurtling down the track back in late 1992, speed racers have been wondering just what Geoff Crammond and his British MicroProse team would conjure up for an encore.

How about the best racing game ever?

GRAND PRIX II is the official name of the sequel to WORLD CIRCUIT (it's marketed as part of the "World Circuit Racing Series"), and for a number of reasons, it's the strongest PC racing title to date. Undoubtedly, that judgment will provoke those who've been feasting on a steady diet of hard-core Papyrus sims and those who prefer the arcade style of racing. If you're one of those skeptics, read on.



SSSMOKIN! Tons of scenery and lots of scorched rubber: the visual advantages to skipping qualifying and starting from the back of the pack. This will teach you how to deal with traffic in very short order.

KEEPING TRACK

GRAND PRIX II (GP II), like its predecessor, is a simulation of Formula One racing. Here, you'll find 16 tracks that'll take you from the storied straights of Hockenheim to the mazelike confines of Monaco, from gear-crazy Interlagos to a Japanese double. Each track is an exacting replica of its real-life counterpart (as of the 1995 season anyway), including recent alterations such as safety modifications to Britain's Silverstone circuit.

Now a better reflection of the reality than WORLD CIRCUIT–era technology could offer, each track sports authentic turns, pavement that is bumpier in some spots than others, and multiple semiauthentic red-green start lights suspended from standards on the front straight.

But it's what lies just off the track that really hits home in the "Wow!" department. GP II supports curbing, as did its predecessor. But now, aside from being an invaluable driving aid, curbing will actually tilt the car into the air, with an accompanying "errrrr" sound as each spinning tire passes over the curb. It's wonderful engineering to be sure, complemented by what occurs when one is in the unfortunate position of running over the curbing and completely off the track.

While grass retards these scorching land rockets to speeds more befitting a lawnmower, the addition of sandtraps further increases the frustration factor. Sand traps are designed to slow an out-of-control vehicle as it careens toward a wall or barrier. But just try and extricate yourself from one as your car tosses clumps of sand into the air and bumps and grinds up and down, maybe damaging a front wing. You'll feel first-hand the downside of sand in real-world racing.

CAR SHOWS

Being mired on the beach is a nice place to drink in the astonishing graphic world of GP II. Like most SVGA racing products these days, it's processor-intensive (read: processor insensitive), and a Pentium 90 should be considered bare bones for high-resolution mode.

On the track, cars are adorned with logos and detailed color schemes. They spark when they ground out, expel unburned fuel as bursts of flame and kick up tire smoke when the wheels spin. In your own car, you'll find that smoke works in perfect sync with tire squeal, and that long trails of it are quite evident in the rear view mirrors.

Speaking of the rear views, they may indeed be the most awesome facet of the game. They actually provide a faithful reproduction of everything behind you—certainly the first time that's been



START ME UP A gorgeous shot of a full pack of starters at the Monaco Grand Prix. That big metal block mid-screen is the back of the starting light tower.



Price: $69.95
System Requirements: 486DX4 100 MHz, 8MB RAM, VGA video, 2x CD-ROM drive, 15 MB hard drive space, Sound Blaster or compatible, MS-DOS 5.2, mouse.
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Geoff Crammond
Developer: MicroProse
Alameda, CA
(510) 522-1164
Reader Service #: 333

Citizens of Planet Earth:

You Are the Enemy.

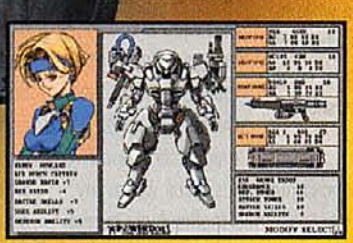
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"You traveled across the galaxy to attack us. You claim our parents freely chose to colonize this world for you! No, This is our world! You drew first blood. Now you must die!

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Minimum Requirements: O/S - DOS 5.0, Ram - 4MB, Video - VGA, CD-ROM - 2x, Hard Disk - 5MB, Sound - Sound Blaster & MIDI, Input - Mouse

seen in the PC racing game. With all detail options cranked up, their reflections are a sight to behold, textures and all. Remember though, it's questionable whether the computer has yet been built that can support all the graphical detail in front *and* behind you without slowing the game to a crawl.



TUNNEL VISION AT MONACO With graphics at full detail, it's near impossible to run a successful race at under five frames per second, and the current position attests to that fact.

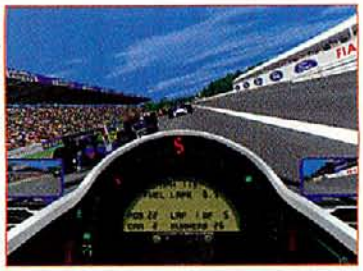
Of course, another morbid graphic detail we all enjoy is the pile-up. Although GP II's crashes don't live up to INDYCAR II in terms of car body parts lost, wings and tires will detach and bodies will break. Furthermore, an entire chassis can and will become airborne in moments of extreme stress, flipping about somewhat unrealistically in what seems to be slow motion before crashing back to earth.

The scenery here is without peer. The pit area features visible crews for all the teams, hands that come across the screen to clean your windshield (it never really gets dirty), and so on. The landscape and sky have to be seen to be believed, and the barriers and signage look to be straight out of a TV broadcast.

BEHIND THE WHEEL

The GP II cockpit retains much of the feel of WORLD CIRCUIT, with elements that, although not true to life, are definitely appreciated on a computer monitor. With a quick glance, you can check on suggested gears for upcoming turns, which driver's aids you have turned on, your current position and lap, car damage and more.

As fast laps are turned, they are posted across the top of the screen, as are retirees and cars in the pits. Turn workers display green and yellow flags as the situation dictates, and you can jump into a competitor's car to monitor what he's doing.

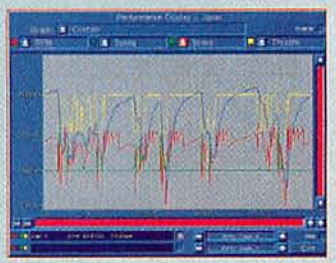


AIRBORNE AT SUZUKA The green flag's just dropped, and someone's been a little overly aggressive. It's common to be able to pick up several spots at the start by sprinting down the sidelines.

The underwhelming victory celebration is a letdown, but post-race statistics are comprehensive and printable. The short (20-second) and unimaginative replay presents more of a problem, simply because occasionally it's incorrect. On one occasion, after having been T-boned and destroyed by another car, my replay showed that I hadn't! As the game lets you pick up again right where the replay ends, I miraculously began driving again, unscathed. What was good news for me this time wasn't good news for the GP II

The Road To Victory

GRAND PRIX II is accessible to beginning and advanced drivers alike. With helpful tutorials scattered throughout the manual, five levels of opponent strength, and seven driver's aids (automatic brakes, automatic gears, self-correcting spin, indestructible car, visible ideal driving line, suggested gear, and throttle assistance), *anyone* can get the car around the track within minutes of taking the wheel.



GRAPH CAPER It'll take a while to master data logging, but when you do and can apply the proper corrective measures, your times should take a dramatic tumble.

But getting really good, good enough to win in Ace mode or turn an all-time fastest lap—that's another story altogether. It's much tougher than it was in WORLD CIRCUIT.

No longer is it a matter of driving fast into a corner and using the other cars as your brake (for the most part, anyway). No longer is the competition confined to the ideal driving line. No more will a couple of minor setup tweaks and a kamikaze driving style see you through to the finish line.

In GP II, each driver has a mind of his own. Race leaders, for example, seem to get a second wind and renewed vigor once they've been passed. Overall, the AI is magnificent, and I've experienced numerous dices where my rivals have assumed frighteningly human qualities, including erring when being pushed hard from behind!

The driving model too is bang-up, with all the foibles and quirks of the real thing. In particular, GP II is an exercise in controlling wheel spin. From the start, where moderate acceleration will keep the tires gripping the track better than a "foot to the floor" approach, to sudden braking that might just put you in a fatal skid and opposite lock skids through turns, it's all here. Mastering the beast is difficult, but possible.

For starters, you should kill as much of the lovely graphic detail as possible. A smooth frame rate's going to help you more than a view of the pretty clouds. Then you'll want to pick a track and stick with it. Learn every nuance—only when you drive it with absolute consistency can you begin experimenting with mechanics. Remember to avoid wheel spin and accelerate and brake smoothly. Feathering both the gas and brake pedal is not a bad idea.

Once your performance is consistent, remain in practice mode and jump

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Computer Game Review

"All in all, Settlers II looks like a substantial improvement on an already excellent gaming system."
Strategy Plus, June '96

"A must for fans of the original and gamers who like God sims."
PC Power, April '96







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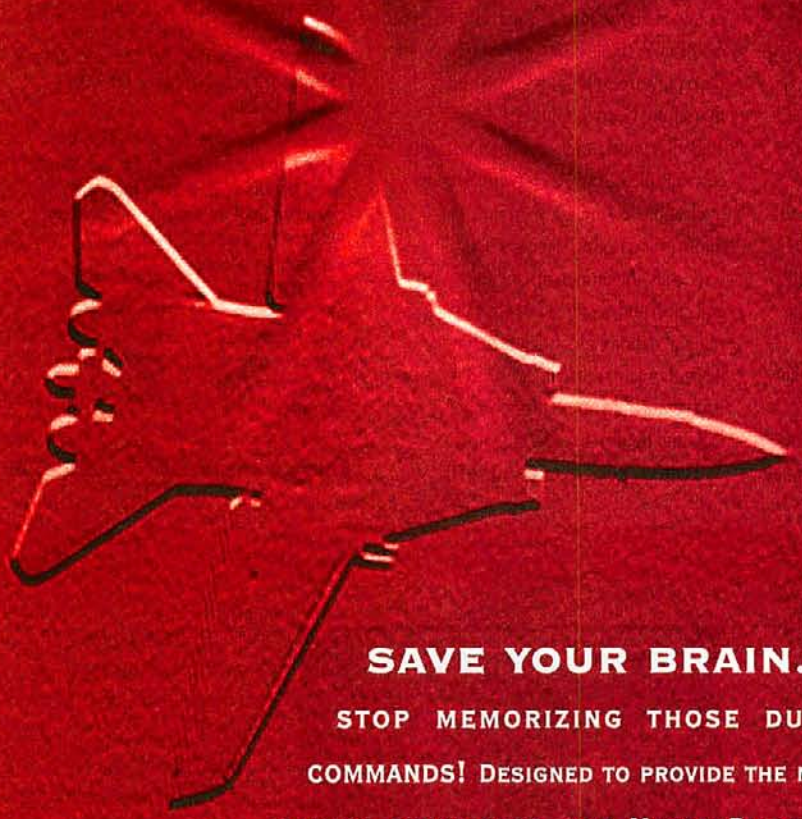
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WATCH THE ROAD Although you may be tempted to crane your neck to look at the scenery, you'd better keep your eyes front and on the mirrors.

quality-control lab.

Replay glitches aside, driving a GP II car is pure and simple. With enough opponent strength variance, driving aids, and car setup options to keep everyone from rookie to sim veteran happy, the program manages to provide accessibility to the masses—something latter-day Papyrus products have had trouble with. In fact, all the courses are quite negotiable with a simple joystick, something you can't say of INDYCAR II.

The game's interface is clean, with a noticeably high-tech look. Menus offer plenty of options ranging from custom-designed control settings that include an amazing array of wheel lock and sensitivity adjustments to extensive visual options, and car setup screens that incorporate even the finest suspension tweaks. Another WORLD CIRCUIT throwback, the "two player/one joystick" mode has, thankfully, been left intact.

Background music is original, yet will certainly please any ZZ Top fan. The on-track audio features great engine and transmission noises, varying wheelspin screeches, the crunch of sand traps, and several crash and accident effects. The game manual is thorough, with lots of hints throughout, as well as appendixes that cover everything from cornering approaches to F1 facts and figures to car setups.

They say good things come to those who wait. GRAND PRIX II, now the definitive racing package, has proved worth our patience.

APPEAL: Open-wheeled racing sim fans, as well as new drivers looking for something easier to get started on than other realistic racing games.

PROS: Beautiful, textured graphics with fully functional rear-view mirrors; great AI with a human quality; excellent depiction of wheel spin; curbs that actually tilt the car; many strong features brought up from WORLD CIRCUIT.

CONS: Drivers are based on the 1994 season; replay is far too short and comes with a bare minimum of camera angles; victory celebration is totally lame. It'll take a truly scorching processor to get all the graphics on, frame rate smooth and gamespeed up to par.

CG RATED

around to the other cockpits (forward and backward cursor keys). Find a hot car such as a Williams, and watch for gear-change timing, top speeds through various sections, approaches to corners and such. If you can construct a car to do what a Williams does, and drive it like the drivers they hire, you're doing something right. Keep the Ideal Line feature turned on and you'll get a graphic idea of where to enter and leave turns while maintaining maximum speed. Don't try little shortcuts like taking the inside line into a turn—it may look faster, but it rarely is.

We could do an entire article on how to best set up your car, but here are a couple of constants to get you started. First, learn and use the Data Logging guide. This is much like the system used by the real-life teams, and that graph will tell you just where you're lagging behind on all track sections.

Second, start by fashioning a speed machine. Get that thing moving as fast as it can on the straights, then start detuning it so it handles the turns. This is when you'll have to *read the manual.* It's filled with information on how to do little things like dialing in more stick without affecting drag down the straights. Don't get frustrated if all this takes hours—or even days or weeks—to get right. Real F1 teams never stop experimenting.



TUNE UP This is one of several setup screens, detailing part of a pretty decent, but not perfect Suzuka setup. Let's see: packers, slow bumps, fast rebounds, bars...Are we talking car setup or strip joints here?

Once you have all this together, go to race mode. Getting fast in practice is one thing, getting good with other drivers all around you is even more important. The chance to practice races again and again against the same pack of drivers is an advantage real drivers don't have. If they did, you can bet they would use it. Learn how slow you have to be going to give a guy a little nudge without incurring damage yourself, and begin thinking several turns ahead.

When you're out there, remember that although tire noise sounds pretty cool when your car is skidding through a corner, squeal is not something you want to hear. Any loss of adhesion is a loss of time. Also, never cruise. Take your foot from the accelerator only to hit the brakes—there's no in-between.

Last, but certainly an important tip: You can drive with much more agility with a good control wheel and pedal unit than with a joystick, so go get one.

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Deadly Serious Simulation

The Closest You'll Get To An F-16 Cockpit Without Enlisting

by Robin G. Kim

Some might say F-16 Fighting Falcon simulations have been done to death and that the last thing the world needs is another one. BACK TO BAGHDAD (B2B), the debut release from Military Simulations, boldly defies such jaded thinking, offering an unconventional combination of great depth and severely limited scope. The design philosophy seems to have been to focus strongly on a few key areas while virtually ignoring all else. The result should appeal to hard-core sim pilots who share the designers' priorities, but others may come away disappointed by the lack of features they've come to expect from contemporary flight sims. Even the target audience may be put off by its demanding hardware requirements and unprecedented list price.

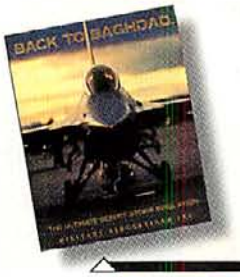


GOING DOWNTOWN Missions will take you over a variety of terrain types and locales, including Baghdad itself.

THE REAL THING

Where B2B truly excels is in accurately simulating what it's like to operate a modern fighter plane. Its flight model is state of the art, matching realistic performance envelopes under a variety of weight and drag configurations with a superb feel. It includes such various subtleties as deep stalls and decreased roll rate when pulling Gs.

The model incorporates a high degree of pitch control, giving you much leeway in trading off airspeed for turn rate. While



Price: $99.95
System Requirements: 90 MHz Pentium, 16 MB RAM, local-bus SVGA video, 2x CD-ROM drive, 75 MB hard drive space, SoundBlaster 16 or compatible, MS-DOS 6.2 or Windows 95; multifunction joystick highly recommended.
Protection: None (CD must be in drive).
Developer: Military Simulations, Inc. Vancouver, WA 98684 (360) 254-2000
Reader Service #: 334

Hawkeye View

In lieu of the usual padlock view, B2B provides a system called Hawkeye to help you track bandits during close-in engagements. Hawkeye packs many pieces of data into a small window that floats about the screen, only appearing in the forward or forward-up cockpit view when the target cannot be seen in that view. Unfortunately, it only works for airplanes; Hawkeye cannot track incoming missiles. The following information is conveyed:

Vertical bar on the left edge: Length shows target range, from 0 to 10 nautical miles.



Caret on the left edge: Vertical position represents target closure. The middle position corresponds to zero closure, moving up for increasing positive closure and down for negative closure (increasing range).



Target image: Helps you deduce plane type and target aspect. It shows which way the target is pointing as if you were facing it directly no matter what its relative direction.

Window position: Determines whether the selected target is above, below, or to the side of you, relatively speaking. For example, if the bandit were at your high five o'clock, the window would be in the upper left-hand corner. If you then rolled inverted, the window would move to the lower right-hand corner of the viewing area—Hawkeye never obscures cockpit instrumentation. The window will only slide toward the center of the screen if the target moves almost directly behind you.





Diamonds strung around the outer circle: Indicates the number of planes in visual range and their bearings relative to your aircraft. In the example above, the diamond would start at the five o'clock position and end up at seven o'clock when you're inverted. The diamonds are color-coded to display friend/foe status, if known.

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this flexibility will be appreciated by experts, it does give overly aggressive players enough rope with which to hang themselves—energy bleeds off rapidly if you insist on holding the stick all the way back in a turning fight.

In addition to its impressive flight modeling, B2B boasts a highly detailed simulation of the F-16's avionics systems. The cockpit of a single-seat fighter as capable as the Falcon is a complex environment, and that carries through to the sim. There are 10 HUD modes and 9 air-to-air and air-to-ground radar modes whose intricate symbologies must be mastered, in addition to 4 other multifunction display (MFD) layouts. The game even supports use of a separate monochrome monitor for use as an external MFD!

Air-to-air radar modeling is top notch. You must manage scan volume and direction to detect and track bogies, balancing the amount of airspace searched with update frequency. Detection range varies with target size and aspect, and radar jamming effects are especially well done. Unfortunately, the simplified air-to-ground modes eliminate several of the more powerful capabilities of the real F-16C's APG-68 radar. It doesn't support ground mapping of terrain features (only target blips appear on the scope) or the generation of high-resolution patch maps. Some flaws in the terrain masking calculations also mar an otherwise outstanding implementation.

B2B's Threat Warning Indicator System (TWIS) is especially noteworthy. Almost all jet sims model some form of radar warning receiver, but this one is a major advance in terms of both realism and functionality. As an obligatory concession to playability, the TWIS does include a missile launch warning system not present in the actual plane.

To make the most of the many avionics modes, B2B provides a good variety of ordnance types, including some exotics like fuel-air explosives and the B-61 tactical nuclear bomb. Weapons modeling is generally excellent, but there are some curious lapses, such as the lack of support for toss bombing, negligible blast radius of laser-guided bombs (blast effects are modeled for other bomb types), and the annoying ability of semiactive radar homing missiles to track you even after the launching platform has been destroyed.



BIG STICK When diplomacy fails, a well-placed B-61 tactical nuke says what words can't.

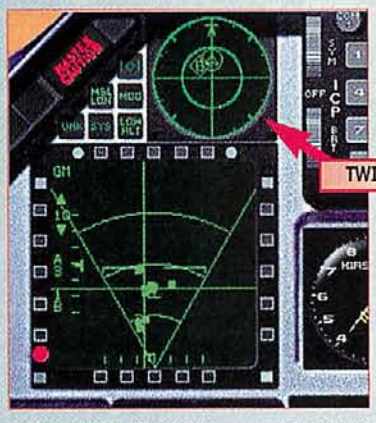
GEOGRAPHICALLY CORRECT

Graphically, B2B is a mixed bag. The texture-mapped terrain and cities look great from down low, where they provide an exhilarating sensation of speed, but at higher elevations there's an abrupt transition to lower levels of detail. The ground ends up almost featureless from above 12,000 feet. (A patch is available from MSI to up the threshold to 24,000 feet.) The topology is generated from reams of geographical data for a large region around Baghdad, so the lay of the land is totally accurate. The price to be paid for this accuracy is a long mission loading time. At the highest detail level, which requires a whopping 32 MB, it takes about 80 seconds to start up a mission on a 133MHz Pentium. A disk cache is absolutely necessary—without one you'll be waiting minutes. Object renderings are fairly plain except for F-16s, which are quite detailed. Aircraft are hard to discern at a distance, but their size can be artificially scaled up to improve visibility.

B2B's cockpit view system breaks from tradition, and the result is not entirely satisfying. Eight fixed views are provided, but they leave a huge blind spot overhead. Visual tracking of bandits must therefore fall to the novel Hawkeye view window

Threat Warning Indicator System

Knowing the ins and outs of the Falcon's TWIS is essential for surviving sorties in a high threat environment. The TWIS not only displays all radars it detects, it also indicates their mode and prioritizes them by threat level. Here are some tips to help you get the most out of this painstakingly simulated piece of equipment.



The best way to keep tabs on any enemy radar systems' painting you is to switch on the TWI's audible warning mode. A bug in the game prevents you from doing this at the start of every mission, so turn it on as soon as the first contact appears on the circular scope. Also make sure you activate the Low Alt mode when flying low, so the system can readjust its threat priorities appropriately.

Slow beeps mean the radar is doing a wide search, so you probably haven't been spotted yet. If the frequency of beeps increases, the radar has probably detected you, because the search area has been focused in your general direction. Different radar types play different beeps, so it pays to learn which is which.

When the beeps turn into a continuous tone, you've been locked up and may soon have a missile inbound. For most types of radar, it's possible to break the lock and delay enemy weapons launch by quickly dumping a chaff bundle. When it works, the tone will be replaced by fast beeps until the radar can lock onto you again. If you're carrying an ECM pod and decide to jam the radar, you must keep the source in a 120-degree arc in front of you for the jamming to be effective.

(see the sidebar for details on its use). Hawkeye efficiently communicates a ton of information once you get the hang of it, but it looks so unnatural that it can ruin a player's sense of immersion in a dogfight. Seeing this little window moving around, effortlessly tracking bogies directly underneath the plane, one is constantly reminded that it's just a game. Hawkeye has the additional disadvantage of being unavailable when you're using the Pixel Load Management option to adjust the coarseness of the exterior graphics. This is unfortunate, because reducing the PLM level really boosts frame rate, which is important in a dogfight, but dogfighting is almost impossible without Hawkeye.

WHERE'S THE BUN?

Because B2B does such a good job on the core F-16 simulation, it's disappointing that the game infrastructure is so limited. Aside from 3 instant action and 13 training scenarios, the heart of the game is a set of 31 canned "active duty" missions based on a Coalition action to stop Saddam Hussein from committing thermonuclear terrorism. The missions are totally independent, and can be played either sequentially, for a campaign flavor, or in arbitrary order. No mission generator is included–what you see is what you get.



FINAL APPROACH A good flight model makes landings a joy, but most missions can be ended in flight, if you prefer.

(An add-on mission generator is planned, however.)

Nearly all sorties are flown solo. On the rare occasions when you do have a wingman along, it's still almost like flying alone, because he cannot communicate with you in any way–digitized speech is reserved for the "Bitchin' Betty" warning system. Wingman commands consist only of "release" and "recall." There are no multiplayer options built in, although an add-on is planned that will support both network and online play.

The missions are challenging enough at the highest difficulty levels to test the mettle of even the most experienced sim pilots—the AI of both bandits and enemy air defenses is first rate. However, the gameplay feels somewhat sterile. Rarely does it seem like you're part of a larger effort, or that a war is really going on around you. Still, the missions are complex and well designed; they should remain interesting through several replays.

LESS ISN'T MORE

A sim as complicated as B2B deserves a large, thorough manual. Sadly, it is instead saddled with incredibly terse and uncommunicative documentation. Most of the information you need to operate the many avionics systems at a basic level is there, but more advanced applications and even the use of some important key commands must be discovered through trial and error. MSI has placed a supplemental manual on their Web site, **www.military-sim.com**, which addresses some of these shortcomings. It adds helpful descriptions of the weapons, aircraft and vehicles in the game, but the two manuals together still paint an incomplete picture. The usual discussions of the physics of flight, instrument landings and tactics are conspicuously absent. Installation is also given short shrift: While most games include a separate installation guide, B2B's manual boils it down to four one-line instructions for DOS and another four for Win95. If anything goes wrong, you're on your own, as there's no troubleshooting section. MSI is developing a thorough manual for the game that the company plans to sell separately, but with a simulation this complex that documentation should have been in the box.

SPLIT DECISION

B2B's lack of a meaningful campaign, mission editor and multiplayer mode renders it a niche product. However, its undeniable strengths in the areas of flight and systems modeling give it a strong foothold in that niche. This is just MSI's first entry into the computer game market, and they've said they plan to expand the base simulation engine in the future, presumably broadening its appeal.

An overall rating won't mean much because B2B tends to polarize gamers. Those who insist on games that simulate the unpredictable chaos of entire battles or wars may be bored to tears by B2B. But if coming as close to the experience of flying an actual F-16 as you can get on a PC excites you enough to accept limited gameplay, obtuse documentation and a high price, then pack your bags, because you're due for a trip to Baghdad.



SILENT BUT DEADLY A laser-guided bomb steers unerringly toward a bridge in downtown Baghdad.

APPEAL: Experienced hard-core flight sim fans who value accurate flight and systems modeling above all else.

PROS: Sets a new standard for the realistic simulation of a single aircraft. A variety of interesting missions to fly. Extremely accurate terrain.

CONS: No real campaign play, no multiplayer support, no wingman communication, lofty CPU requirements, extremely poor documentation, and high list price.

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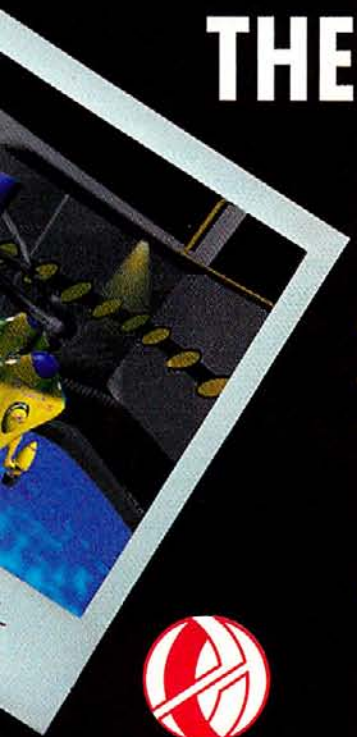
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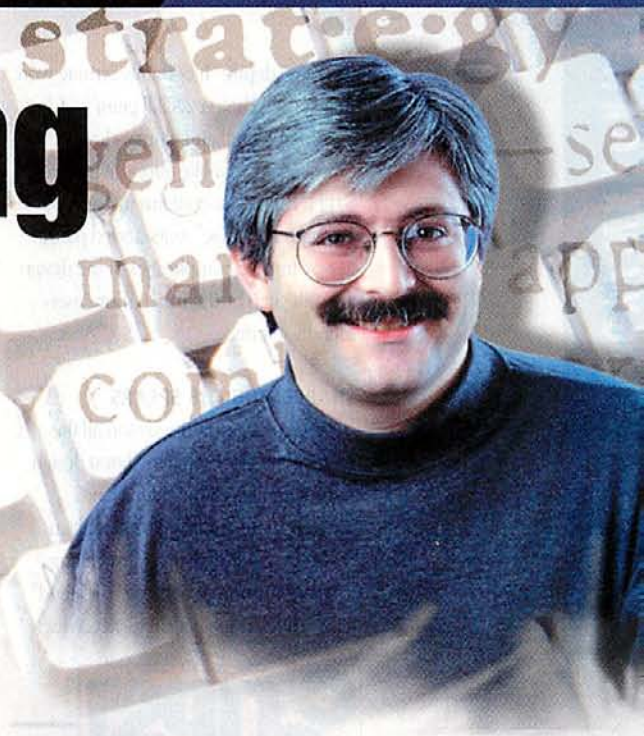
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The Washing Of Spears

ZULUWAR! Is Balanced, Tense, And Above All, Fun

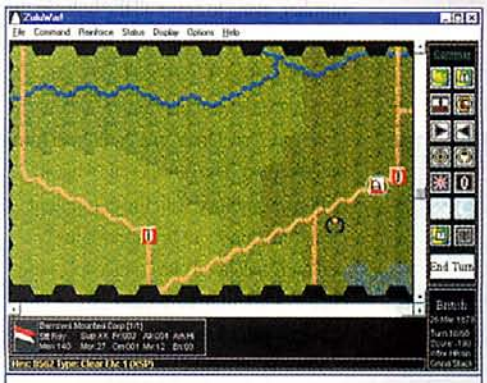


Since PANZER GENERAL's runaway success, some hard-core wargamers have begun to decry the demise of "serious computer wargames." At first glance, they seem to have a point:

▸ PANZER GENERAL, although incredibly addictive, can hardly be called a "serious" wargame. There are a number of combat factors that PG abstracts, including supply, morale, and replacements, so those looking for great historical insights on WWII probably won't find them.

▸ The biggest strategy hits of last year were COMMAND & CONQUER and WARCRAFT II. The former had ludicrous fog of war rules: despite satellite technology, you couldn't see a tree a hundred yards away until you sent a scout to recon. The latter had too little qualitative difference between comparable Orc and Human forces. Within the sci-fi/fantasy realm, both MASTER OF ORION and WARLORDS II (designed some two years earlier) were more "realistic" strategic simulations, prompting some to call C&C-type games "the great step backwards."

▸ The biggest strategy hit so far this year is CIV II. Realism sticklers have a field day with this title, citing how catapults (despite low odds) can sometimes take out units armed with guns, how unrealistic it is to have high-tech medical advances in the 19th century, and so on.



AVOID TEMPTATION Here the British player makes the common mistake of splitting his columns to pursue Zulu forces. Unbeknownst to him, there are several rabid Zulu warriors just out of recon range.

So is the state of wargame design floundering? Hardly. I really feel for anyone who can't enjoy the focus, great computer opponents, and wonderful campaigns of PANZER GENERAL and CIVILIZATION II. Certainly, the success of C&C and WARCRAFT II will spawn a host of real-time imitators, but that doesn't mean that turn-based historical games are dead–far from it. The irony is that PG, CIV II, C&C and WARCRAFT II are more alike than their detractors admit. After discovering SVGA graphics, multimedia and lush sound, it's doubtful that wargames are going to return to the days of yore. I have a lot of respect for Gary Grigsby, but given a choice between PACIFIC WAR and STEEL PANTHERS, it's obvious that the latter is no less realistic and a heck of a lot more playable.

Ah, but I hear you say, "PACIFIC WAR

> "Incredible Simulations lives up to its name with another 'Last Stand' thriller."

BRIEFINGS

▸ Given that Tom Clancy teamed with Larry Bond to use the latter's *Harpoon* miniatures system to "test-game" battles in his *Red Storm Rising* novel–and that he was on the Avalon Hill advisory board for a time–it comes as little surprise that Clancy is involved in the production of a computer game from Simon and Schuster Interactive. Tom is evidently writing the script for the game, which is going to be developed by a company in Research Triangle Park, NC, known primarily as a 3D Web site tool builder. The product is set for release in late 1997.

▸ Talonsoft's Battleground series just keeps getting better (see Johnny Wilson's review of SHILOH in this section). Next on tap is Antietam, the bloodiest day of fighting ever on the North American continent. The design

▸▸▸▸continued on page 265

TERRY COLEMAN

has more depth." It certainly is more work than STEEL PANTHERS, I'll grant you; but it's also outdated and clunky, despite Grigsby's yeomanlike efforts at updates. STEEL PANTHERS contains just as many "Grigsby formulae" as its storied predecessor, but the complexities of the design are mitigated by the much more user-friendly interface.

SHARPENING THE SPEARS

What makes this discussion all the more interesting is that the latest design from Incredible Simulations lands squarely in the middle of the "realism versus playability" debate. Just calling ZULUWAR! another of those "last stand" games doesn't really do it justice. Much like the BATTLEGROUND Series from Talonsoft, Jeff Lapkoff's designs have improved with each new installment. DEFEND THE ALAMO! was actually *real time*, which worked nicely to capture the feel of Texan defenders, far too few in number, trying to cover all the holes in the Alamo's defenses against overwhelming Mexican forces. CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND let you play either "Yellow Hair" or Crazy Horse in a traditional turn-based setting. The number of "what-if" options, combined with the competent computer opponent to make for lively and fairly balanced play–a nice job, especially considering the controversy of the subject matter.

ZULUWAR! marks Incredible Simulations' most ambitious design yet. Unlike CUSTER, the scale of the Zulu-British conflict can't be confined into a platoon-level game. If you simulate only Rorke's Drift, you lose Islandhwana, for example. ZULUWAR! thus takes on the entire campaign, showcasing the Zulu warriors' superior mobility versus the incredible firepower of the British Army. Turns are five days each–by contrast, ALAMO! took only 13 days to recreate the entire siege–and two miles per hex, appropriate for the battalion level maneuvering it simulates.

STIFF UPPER LIP, WHAT?

As British commander Lord Chelmsford, you face a daunting task: to subjugate the native tribes without taking too many casualties–shades of Desert Storm. Your task is made all the more difficult by bad weather, disease from the harsh African climate, and an angry army of fierce Zulu warriors, some 50,000 strong. If you are too cautious, the Zulu forces will become bold enough to attack British camps; too bold, and you'll return home in disgrace, having lost to a "group of savages." Even if you find the right march tempo, however, you may find that victory eludes your grasp long enough for the Zulu king, Cteshwayo, to sue for a more favorable peace.

When portraying Cteshwayo, you must keep your royal personage away from the insidious British until the gods grant your brave warriors the final victory over the hated foe. Your warriors are fleet of foot, and they have more firearms than the enemy suspects (you may adjust the percentage of Zulus carrying flintlock muskets when setting up the scenario).

IT IS A GOOD DAY TO DIE!

In normal combat, the British begin with any machine gun fire, then the two sides exchange rifle fire, and finally meet in hand-to-hand combat. A popular Zulu tactic is to try and ambush the British, where the natives get to fire first, and their superior melee strengths are deadly. The British counter by burning the Zulu kraals, putting the warrior *impis* out of commission permanently. The fog of war rules require the British to use their cavalry for recon, and keep Chelmsford's columns from getting too cocky. For British players who have memorized



BLOOD & FIRE After a victory (note the skull symbol), Zulu *impi* will often break formation and go home to celebrate the victory. Don't win your battles too close to home, or the remaining British will burn your kraal (as here) before your units can regain formation.

CG TIPS!

Tips For ZuluWar!

- Once the tide turns against the Zulus, Cteshwayo generally flees



toward the upper left corner of the map. Make sure to coordinate your late reinforcements to surround the Zulu king.

- As the Zulus, ambush the British player as he crosses a river. The move-



ment this requires often leads little for entrenched camps.

- To balance a game between a new and veteran player, give the novice the Natal Zulus for extra firepower, but *not* with the Guerrilla option.



Price: $44.95 (+ $4.00 s&h)
Required: 386 or better, Windows 3.1 or better, 4 MB RAM, 3 MB hard drive space, SVGA graphics, Windows compatible sound.
of Players: 1-2 (hot-seat & e-mail)
Designers: Jeff Lapkoff and Dennis Bishop
Publisher: Incredible Simulations
Oak Park, IL
(408) 554-8381 (HPS Simulations)
Reader Service #: 340

Hurl A Different Spear

Of the historical alternatives available, the best bet for the Zulu player is to opt for the "Guerrilla" war, avoiding huge battles in an attempt to frustrate the British. This isn't mere design chrome, but a viable historical alternative–the British were horrified at the prospect. Think about how badly the British fared when facing guerrilla tactics during the Boer War just a few years later, against troops nowhere near as ferocious as the Zulus.

The "Hollywood" scenario is exactly that–about as realistic as slave ships in *Ben Hur*. But don't let that stop you from having some fun here. This is a good way to get your first win against the Zulus, and it makes for a really short game, regardless of who wins.



PLANET HOLLYWOOD Cteshwayo wouldn't recognize these warriors, but the fanatical charges help sharpen your defensive skills for the real game.

the location of the Zulu kraals, just randomize their setup hexes before starting the scenario.

There are a lot of nice touches in the design. If, for example, a particular British unit doesn't move its full allowance, whatever movement points it has remaining are turned into fortification. So if you're force-marching your columns to the limits of their endurance in an attempt to keep up with the Zulus, you won't have a fortified camp to cover your assets when the inevitable counterattack comes. There is a real temptation for the British player to split his columns in an attempt to pin down the Zulu forces. He often succeeds–at a terrible cost. Similarly, the Zulu player is enticed to go after British forces in headlong assaults before enemy reinforcements arrive.

There's no magic formula that gives you the "best" winning chances, making ZULUWAR! a very replayable game. Also, the game's asymmetric nature helps to keep the outcome in question, often until the last few turns. The AI is stronger than in most wargames, and will try different strategies from game to game. But where ZULUWAR! truly shines is in two-player mode, as there are numerous opportunities for feint, manuever, ambush and bludgeon, even in the shorter scenarios. The better you know your opponent's style, the more devious your strategies become.

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Now, as an "old guard" gamer myself, I find myself having to ask: "Is ZULUWAR! realistic?" Given its operational scale, the game certainly has a different feel than say, a Civil War or WWII historical epic. There's enough flavor with the Maxim machine guns, the burning kraals, the Zulu ambushes–but those who want this game to be "Chelmsford's Last Command" may want more tactical detail. On the other hand, ZULUWAR! is *psychologically* realistic, because it puts you in the mindset of the military leaders of the period.

In the end, ZULUWAR! is a good example of where wargames are headed these days: well-balanced, tense, and enjoyable, it's a more than passingly historical game that achieves its goals without becoming mired in complexity for its own sake. And for obscure subjects like these, you're going to get a lot more gamers hooked on wargames with ZULUWAR! than you are with a dozen TACOPS, for all the latter's claims of superior "realism." CG

APPEAL: Anyone who wants a fun, playable game on a relatively obscure subject.

PROS: Tough computer opponent; unique situation handled simply but fairly realistically; tons of clever "what-ifs."

CONS: Because of the operational scale, tactical detail is lost, and Custer/Alamo fans may feel slighted.

CG RATED

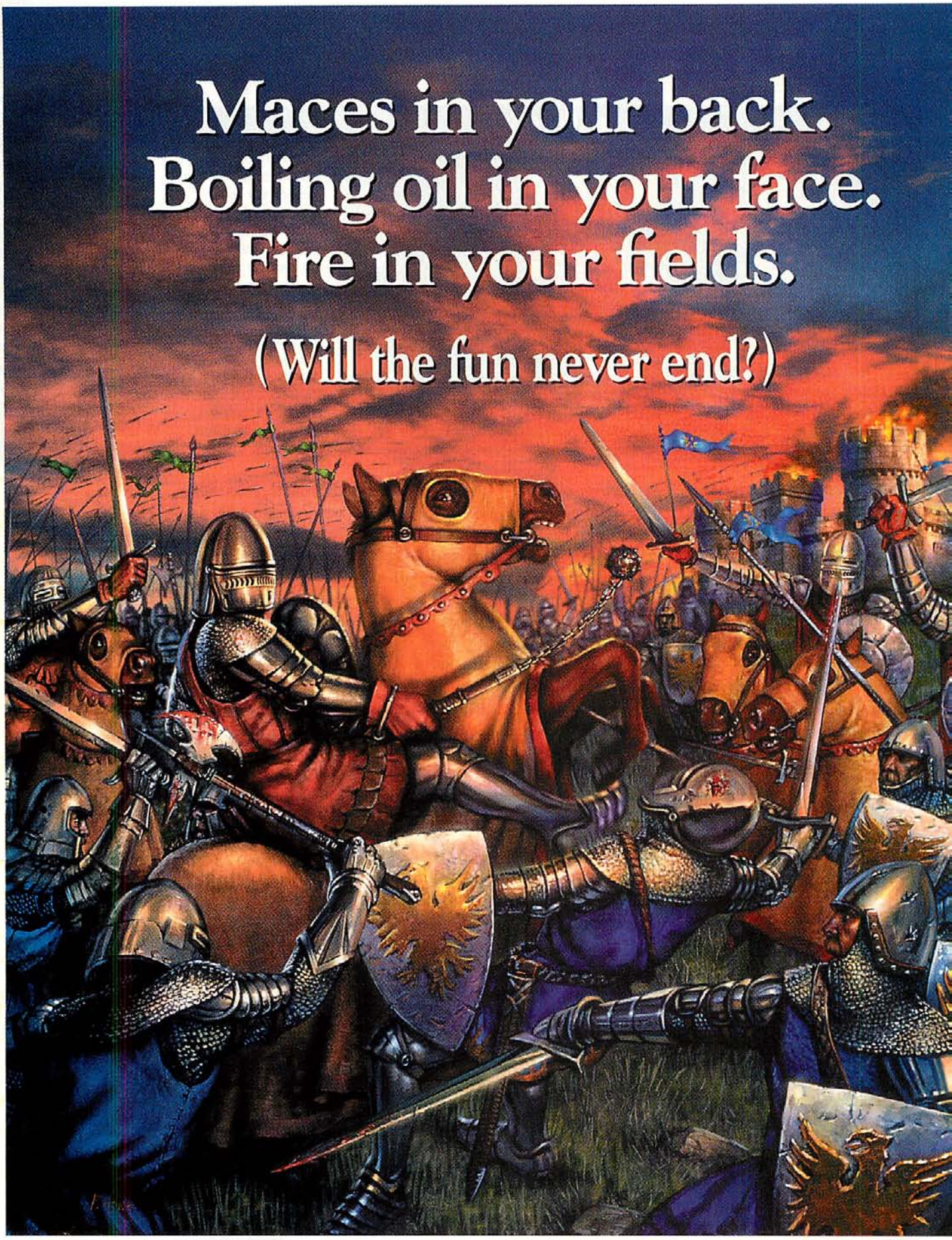
BRIEFINGS

▸▸▸▸continued from page 263

features some command control restrictions on the Union to provide the proper historical balance, plus a "what if McClellan woke up" scenario where the little Napoleon can end the Civil War in a single battle. After Antietam is published, the series returns to the 20th century with BG: SINAI.

▸ In a departure for Talonsoft, the upcoming AGE OF SAIL will be real time rather than turn-based. It will be interesting to see how the flow of play–you can give orders to formations as well as single ships–compares to Avalon Hill's WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN. Expect a sneak preview as soon as the game system is filled out enough for a test sail.

▸ Interactive Magic is happy enough with the success of AMERICAN CIVIL WAR: FROM SUMTER TO APPOMATTOX that they have reached an agreement with Frank Hunter to publish a similar title on the Napoleonic Wars, probably next year.



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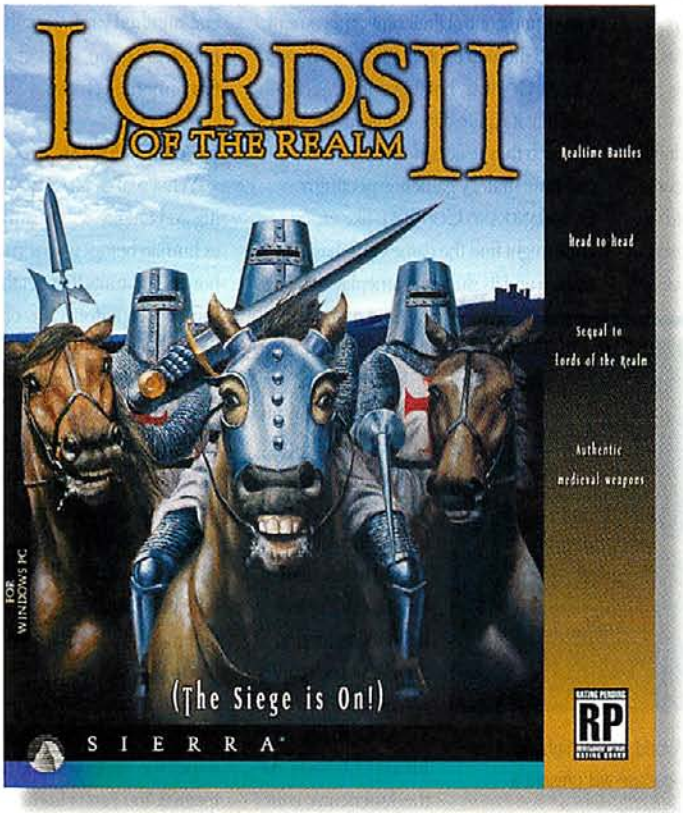


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Impressions **Designed by Impressions Software**

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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Up Close And Personal

CLOSE COMBAT Captures The Feel Of World War II Combat

by Patrick C. Miller

If someone had told me a few years ago that I would be playing and enjoying a real-time historic war game published by Microsoft that ran under Windows, I would have laughed. Well, here's CLOSE COMBAT, available for IBM-compatible PCs and Macintosh PowerPCs, and I'm not laughing anymore. Designed by Atomic Games and published by Microsoft, it looks, sounds and plays like nothing else: a game that not only convincingly portrays the blood-and-guts feel of close-range combat in World War II, but also gives players a plausible taste of what it must be like to be in command of real soldiers.

Given the long, sometimes tortuous, development that has surrounded this game since it began as BEYOND SQUAD LEADER under Avalon Hill, let's first define what CLOSE COMBAT isn't. It isn't a computerized version of the popular board game, *Squad Leader*. Fans of turn-based games who prefer to contemplate their moves and control their units' movement and fire shouldn't automatically dismiss CLOSE COMBAT, but they should recognize that it's quite different from the games to which they're accustomed. Likewise, real-time strategy gamers expecting a COMMAND AND CONQUER-like experience might find the game's emphasis on realism and its sluggish gameplay to be less fun and more work than they anticipated.



A BRIDGE TOO AURE If you want to win, you'll have to use smoke to hide your maneuvers. Here, the Americans lay smoke with their mortars in preparation for an assault across the Aure River.

What CLOSE COMBAT does best is simulate small-scale engagements fought in the six weeks following the Allies' successful invasion of France. The units depicted belong to the 29th U.S. Infantry Division and the 352nd German Infantry Division. As the Americans, your objective is to reach the town of Saint-Lo and drive the Germans out, opening the road to Paris. As the Germans, your goal is to delay the American advance as long as possible. There are 39 battles that can be fought individually or as part of a campaign. The battles are highly tactical affairs, often fought in the space of several hundred yards, usually involving an infantry platoon, support weapons and a few armored vehicles.



HUNGRY HEDGEROWS Just as in World War II, fighting through the hedgerows of France's *bocage* will present a unique tactical challenge for the Americans.

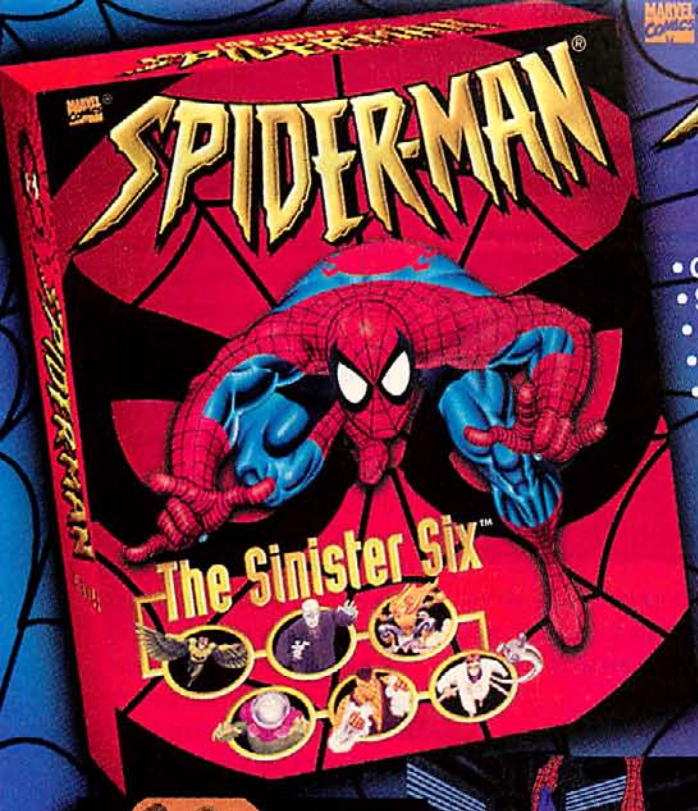
I CAN'T TAKE IT!

What makes CLOSE COMBAT interesting and unique is its treatment of soldiers as human beings who sometimes pull bonehead stunts that get them killed and sometimes perform acts of incredible heroism. The game is based on a psychological model of combat stress developed by Dr. Steven Silver of Temple University. Each soldier's physical and emotional state is monitored to determine how he reacts to circumstances affecting his ability to follow orders and perform effectively in combat. This means that battles are less about inflicting casualties and seizing objectives and more about destroying the enemy's will to fight.

Battles can be played at an easy, normal or hard level of difficulty, which determines the forces you and the enemy receive. You can't choose or customize your units. The computer automatically



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of Players: 2
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Keith Zabalaoui, Atomic Games
Publisher: Microsoft Redmond, WA (206) 637-9308
Reader Service #: 335



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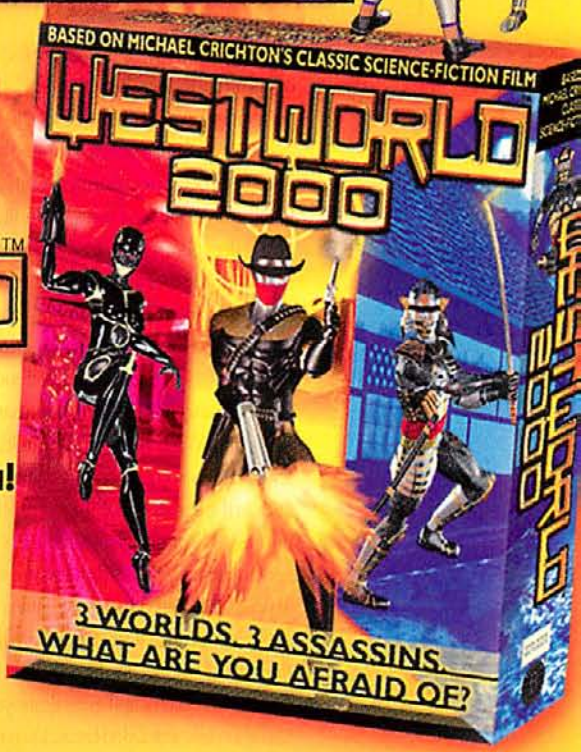
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Close Combat Survival Guide

Play as the Germans first. Defense is easier and you have fewer units to command. Panzerfausts give German riflemen anti-tank capability.

During deployment, you can check a unit's line of sight by pressing the Alt key while selecting the unit.

If events are moving too fast, set the game speed to slow or medium.

To issue orders, use the keyboard commands: Z = Move, X = Fast Move, C = Fire, V = Smoke, B = Defend and N = Hide.

When the battle starts, immediately issue a defend command to your entire force to avoid having units act on their own.

Use the zoomed out view to minimize map scrolling. On the Jump map, click on the area you want to view and then zoom in. This map also labels spotted enemy units, helping to quickly identify the most significant threats.



THE BIG PICTURE It's not exactly pretty, but the zoomed-out map allows you to issue orders easily, keep an eye on everything, and quickly zoom to areas requiring your attention.

Use the team monitor at the lower left to give orders. Double-clicking on a unit will select it and center the map on its location.

To fire mortars, get the target in sight, single-click on the mortar in the team monitor, press the C key and then click on the target.

If you've selected an order you've decided not to give, pressing the Esc key will cancel it.

It's easier to find and see your units if you don't display forests.

To back up a vehicle, give it a normal move order (Z key) and then click an inch or two directly behind it.

You can change a unit's target or destination by dragging and dropping its fire or movement dot to a new location.

deploys your units, but you have the opportunity to reposition them before combat begins. Once the action starts, it doesn't stop until one side's morale fails or both sides become exhausted. Unfortunately, you're allowed no opportunity to give orders prior to combat, which initially can force you to issue frenzied instructions in an effort to avoid pointless casualties.

There are six unit commands: Move, Move Fast, Fire, Fire Smoke, Defend and Hide. (Strangely, there is no command to cease fire). While this sounds simple, mastering tactics in the *bocage* (hedgerows) and on the streets of Saint-Lo is anything but easy. The artificial intelligence is quite good at infantry tactics, but less impressive at using armored vehicles. At battle's end, each side receives a score based on the number of casualties inflicted, objectives taken and vehicles and guns destroyed. You can also view a detailed breakdown of how each man performed during combat, and you can save a replay of the battle. Two-player network play is supported through a TCP/IP connection, enabling play on a LAN or via the Internet. Direct modem-to-modem connections are not supported.

WHEN YOU WIN, YOU LOSE

In the campaign game, the Americans strive to improve on the U.S. Army's actual performance by attempting to advance ahead of the historical timeline. The Germans try to put the Americans as far behind schedule as possible. Some players might be put off by the game's use of "dynamic play balancing," which is intended to keep one side from gaining so great an advantage that they easily breeze through a campaign. In theory, the idea has merit, but in practice, it has the effect of penalizing success and excusing failure.

CLOSE COMBAT is a good game, but it could have been better. Some will find gameplay extremely frustrating, not because the game is tough to learn, but because the best techniques for giving orders and moving around the map are largely ignored in the manual (see sidebar). These omissions, combined with the real-time system, slow map scrolling and delayed responses to mouse clicks, make the game seem more difficult than it is and more frustrating than it should be. Microsoft shot itself in the foot by failing to provide adequate documentation on how to best play the game. Of course, you *could* plunk down $16.95 for the Microsoft strategy guide advertised in the manual.

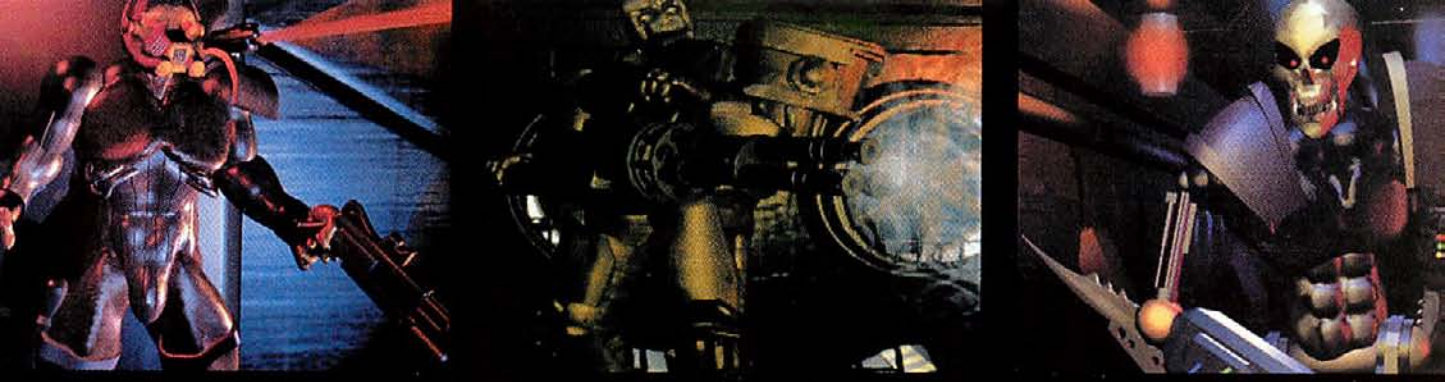
CLOSE COMBAT is unmatched in its ability to provide a realistic and challenging experience from the perspective of a World War II infantry lieutenant. However, the biggest question mark is its replay value as a solo game. Once you've mastered the tactics and played the campaign to its conclusion from each side, there's little incentive to revisit the game. Its focus is too narrow, its depth too limited and the capability to create custom battles is nonexistent. Still, CLOSE COMBAT is a unique and innovative work that provides multiplayer capability and breaks new ground in real-time wargaming. If Atomic can improve and expand on the concept, the best may be yet to come.

APPEAL: Players seeking a realistic, challenging real-time simulation of highly tactical World War II infantry and armor combat.

PROS: The graphics, sounds and combat model make CLOSE COMBAT an outstanding "you are there" real-time simulation. The artificial intelligence is generally strong and realistic tactics are required for success. Two-player network play is also provided.

CONS: Sometimes sluggish performance, even on high-end Pentium systems. Lacks documentation on keyboard commands and shortcuts, has no scenario-editing capability and its focus is too narrow.

CG RATED



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sci

RP

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Amazing Artificial Intelligence plays like it's got one. (A big one.)

Sadist. Megalomaniac. Slightly less than attractive. Meet Commander Zod. You'll answer to him as you lead armies of beer-swilling, drunken robot soldiers from planet to planet, destroying everything that stands in your way. The game is called Z. It's got the depth of a strategy game, and the balls of an action game. Featuring the most realistic explosions out there, over 35 minutes of 3-D scenes and multi-player options for network and modem play. Z. Drink beer. Blow stuff up. It's going to get ugly. Really ugly.

"The action in Z can be described in one word: intense." *PC Gamer*

"Humorous, fast-paced and crowded with dismembered body parts and debris, Z promises to be a very stressful and challenging title that ups the ante on real-time wargaming." *Computer Gaming World*

"...Forget *Warcraft;* this game offers strategy, action and humor– with an incredible A.I. to back it all up." *Fusion*

Commander Zod is waiting. www.vie.com

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They're drunk. They're stupid. They're on your side.



It's a fight for Zod, for country and for beer. (Not necessarily in that order.)



PC CD-ROM

Circle Reader Service #184

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

CG CHOICE

Sabbath Slaughter

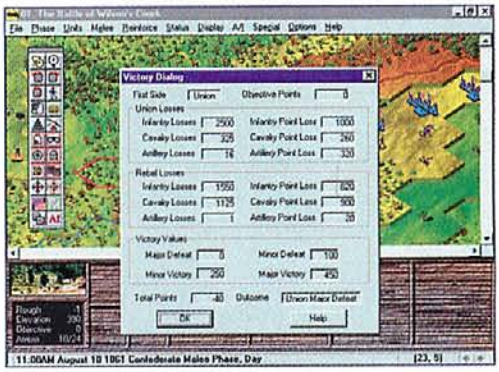
BATTLEGROUND 4 Recruits Gamers For Bloody Shiloh

by Johnny L. Wilson

The sun creeps over the horizon, as Union soldiers stir from their tents on a peaceful Tennessee morning. The calm is broken by the eerie sound of a Rebel Yell, and the disorganized Yankees are driven to scramble for defensive positions. Two of these, the Hornet's Nest and Bloody Pond, evoke images of bitter struggle through their very names. From the death-dealing buzz of Minié balls at the former to the pathos of wounded and dying soldiers vying for a last, perhaps life-saving drink at the latter, these places are as much a part of our Civil War memories as Pickett's charge at Gettysburg. In fact, Shiloh was such an ungainly slaughter that it seemed to prove the point of the brilliant Prussian general, Helmuth von Moltke, that the American Civil War was merely "a struggle of two armed mobs."



BRONZE MISSIONARY Cannon such as the one aimed at this Union unit were supposed to "convert" the enemy or "send them to kingdom come."



BODY COUNT Casualties for this Wilson's Creek replay are about 1,500 casualties higher, respectively, than the Union's real 1,235 and the Confederacy's 1,095.

"I'VE MET THE ELEPHANT BEFORE AND THE WAY TO DO IS TO KEEP COOL AND AIM LOW."

Private A. C. Voris of the 17th Illinois

BATTLEGROUND 4: SHILOH is a brilliant design for illustrating the chaos of American Civil War battles in the West. The package includes three historical battles (Shiloh, Wilson's Creek and Prairie Grove), nine minibattles within the Shiloh conflict (from 7 to 37 turns in length), and four "what-if" scenarios (one for Wilson's Creek and three for Shiloh). Whatever your preference in terms of Union or Confederate, playing all of the scenarios will give you ample opportunity for daring attacks or bold defenses.

Perhaps the most interesting difference between SHILOH and its predecessors, however, is the troop mix. The units in these battles are largely untrained and undisciplined. This means that they become disrupted more easily and rout more frequently than they do in the other games of the series. In terms of history, it means that you can vividly see Sigel's advance falter at Wilson's Creek or watch in wonder as entire units rout after their first experience of receiving fire. In game terms, it means that you have to become a master of improvisation. Did that vanguard get decimated charging the hill? Better get your leaders over to the routed troops and try to rally them at the same time as you're drawing your enemy's attention with a quick maneuver on the flank.

The relative inexperience of the troops also means that, in most of the scenarios, you'll want to trade speed for covering terrain. The battlefields in SHILOH have extremely wooded terrain and a great variety in land elevation. It is well worth it to take an extra turn or two to travel through the trees in order to bring your full-strength and undisrupted units adjacent to the enemy before they take any damage.

In BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG and BATTLEGROUND: WATERLOO, maneuvering was elegant and purposeful–a military ballet of sorts. In SHILOH, you depend on quick moves and countermoves—more of a military sock hop where you ad lib your moves based on morale calculations and terrain opportunities. BCW gamers may miss the infantry squares and cavalry charges, but all BG fans will probably like what the smaller units and increased



Price: $49.95
System Requirements: 486-DX33 (Pentium 70 or better recommended), Windows 3.1 or 95, 8 MB RAM (16 recommended), 2x CD-ROM, SVGA graphics, 5 MB hard disk space, mouse, Windows-compatible sound card.
of Players: 1-2
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designers: John Tiller, Jim Rose, Joseph Hummel and Charles Kibler
Publisher: TalonSoft Software
Forest Hill, MD
(410) 821-7282
Reader Service #: 336

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Circle Reader Service #207



FOOL ON THE HILL After an overly aggressive Union charge at Prairie Grove, the Rebels pushed the Yanks to the edge of the map.

emphasis on morale (not to mention shorter scenarios) do to gameplay.

"THE SEARCHING BULLET FOUND MANY AN UNFORTUNATE IN HIS BED."

Major George Mason

Another interesting aspect of SHILOH is that the battles of Shiloh and Wilson's Creek were surprise attacks. At Shiloh, General Sherman insisted that no attack was coming, even when his own officer reported that Confederates were coming in force. At Wilson's Creek, the rebels didn't even believe the early sounds of rifle fire when they heard it. SHILOH simulates the surprise attack aspect very well using the "fixed" troop method (familiar from the other games in the series) where units are not released until the appropriate point in the simulated day of battle. It's fascinating to watch the effects of hostile fire on an unsuspecting enemy.

Further, it seems like the AI has been adjusted to become more aggressive in SHILOH than it was in BCG and BCW. I particularly noticed this when I was commanding the Confederates during the Prairie Grove scenario. Contrary to history, where Union General Herron awaited the rebels in the timber atop an Arkansas hill, the outnumbered Yankees charged down the hill and into a deadly crossfire from my troops hidden in the woods. By the time General Blunt's troops arrived to reinforce Herron, his troops were routed from the map and my forces controlled the objective hexes.

"Get ready, the Johnnies are here thicker than Spanish needles in a fence corner!"

Union defender at Shiloh



REBEL HELL Since SHILOH is a hex-based system, make sure you make your melees count. Surround the defending unit, so that if it has to retreat, it will have to retreat through a Zone of Control (ZOCs are the hexes immediately adjacent to your unit). If there is no other avenue of retreat other than through the ZOC of your unit, the enemy is totally destroyed. This has the advantage of not only clearing the hex, but scores extra victory points, as well.



THE BLOOD BOAT Death was the Union army's cruise director when these floating artillery units pulled into port.

The other improvement in the AI seems to be in target prioritization. The AI uses counter-battery fire better than I remember it in either BCG or BCW, and it appears to hone in on weak units better than it did in the other BG games.

"TONIGHT WE WILL WATER OUR HORSES IN THE TENNESSEE."

General A. S. Johnston

Of course, Johnston didn't get to water his horse in the Tennessee on the night of April 6th or any subsequent night (he died trying to rally demoralized troops). In SHILOH, as in history, the gunboats are a thorn in the Rebel side. To simulate the impact of the gunboats, SHILOH allows them to use indirect fire (fire at any target within range, regardless of line of sight). The existence of the gunboats makes playing the Union interesting, even if the early going does look like Johnston's plan of rolling up the right and powering through the center is going to work. Union players always know they have an ace in the hole.

"I GIVE UP ALL IDEA OF SAVING THE UNION EXCEPT BY COMPLETE CONQUEST."

General U. S. Grant immediately after Shiloh

At this point, I simply have to admit my bias. It may be that I have simply become more and more comfortable (and more and more pleased) with the BG system. With more aggressive AI, more fascinating music and more interesting scenarios, I just can't stop playing. To me, SHILOH is the best in an already excellent series. Taken from a reviewer who prefers Napoleonic battlefields to ACW killing grounds, that should say something. The BG series is special and getting more so.

APPEAL: Combines the best aspects of miniatures and board games with the distinctive BATTLEGROUND visual style.

PROS: Challenging AI, fascinating scenarios, perfect music, interesting terrain and new gunboats make this the best BATTLEGROUND yet.

CONS: Some people won't like the necessary micro-management.

CG RATED

Hell To The Chief

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Try Playing President With A Traitor In Your Midst

by Tim Carter

From academics like John Mearsheimer to political columnists like P.J. O'Rourke, many commentators have remarked that the United States needs an external enemy. As a Canadian, I would have to disagree. In a computer game, though, opposition is a necessity. And a computerized president needs an enemy—or more than one. CYBERJUDAS has enemies in unexpected places.



ON TOP OF THE WORLD In CYBERJUDAS, you play the ultimate role, that of U.S. president, vying for world dominance, seeking re-election and rooting out corruption in your administration.

In Merit Systems' CYBERJUDAS, the sequel to SHADOW PRESIDENT (SP), players take control of the foreign policy and budget of the United States. As in SP, little or no domestic policy is involved, and players spend most of their time looking outward. CYBERJUDAS builds on the solid international model of SP, putting players in command of a wide range of foreign policy options, both nasty and nice.

Players may opt for one of three situations: Presidential Simulator, Cabinet Wars, or CyberJudas. In each game, you must keep your popularity level high enough to ensure re-election, while attempting to boost a number of other indicators of success, including your effectiveness, the level of conflict in the world, and the global standard of living. You may use the full range of diplomatic, economic, military, and covert actions in support of your aims. The effects of your actions are shown for both the United States and the target country.

The level of detail in CYBERJUDAS is superb, with a highly complex set of interactions between your policy options and the eventual outcomes both at home and abroad. For those not familiar with foreign policy strategies or international relations in general, though, this level of complexity could be daunting.

A significant problem with both SHADOW PRESIDENT and the Presidential Simulator in CYBERJUDAS is that the world is just too benign. In this accurate model of the post-cold war environment, the United States has an abundance of military and economic power, and generally has an easy time getting what it wants. This may be a good place to be in reality, but it's not so good if you're looking for a challenging evening of gaming.

The designers have moved to overcome this problem by adding in additional game situations. In Cabinet Wars, your advisors forcefully push their own agendas, which may not match yours and certainly won't match each others'. Your cabinet is a pretty touchy lot, and threats to resign will pour in once you start disagreeing with them. However, since the advisors are a key source of information, ignoring them makes winning considerably more difficult.

In the CyberJudas scenario, one of these individuals is actually a highly devious traitor bent on your destruction. This advisor will take action without authorization, and can make a mess of an otherwise peaceful world. The presence of an enemy in your midst, someone working actively against you, adds tremendously to gameplay.



GOOD DAY, MR. PRESIDENT Though your advisors can be a good source of advice, they will often try to push their own agendas.



Price: $69
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-33 or better, 8 MB RAM, 20 MB HD space, 2x CD-ROM, SVGA graphics; supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards.
of players: 1
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designers: Robin Antonick, Charlie Athanas, Glenn Doren and Brad Stock
Publisher: Merit Studios
Dallas, TX
214-385-2957
Reader Service #: 337



ANDERSON,
I NEED A VOLUNTEER.



THAT TANK UP THE ROAD? SOMEONE'S GOTTA TAKE IT OUT.

I NEED SOMEONE I CAN COUNT ON. SOMEONE WHO'S MAN ENOUGH TO RUN THROUGH MACHINE GUN FIRE TO GET THE JOB DONE.

AND ANDERSON, THERE COULD BE A MEDAL IN IT FOR YA.



Anderson, Chuck. Sergeant. Leads 2nd Platoon's Recon team. Probably gotta wife back home. Damn good soldier. You give him an order and he figures out the best way to get the job done. So what's he doing cowering behind that bombed-out farmhouse?

Saving his own butt.

That's what you should expect if you order him to do something crazy. In Close Combat everything reacts like it does on the battlefield, from the ripping canvas hiss of the German MG42 machine gun to the screams of the men it hits. It all goes down right in front of you. In real time.



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So there's no time to thumb through the manual. You work your mouse like a weapon. Point and click and *boom*, the shooting starts the second your men step off Omaha Beach and it don't let up 'til they've taken Saint-Lô. Troops, terrain, situations – if you want to get any more accurate, you'll have to shave your head.

Wanna go head to head with other military geniuses? All you need is a TCP/IP connection. And guts.

To experience Close Combat visit your nearest recruiter or head straight for the battlefield at **http://www.microsoft.com/games/kickbutt/**

Download the trial version and start your basic training today.



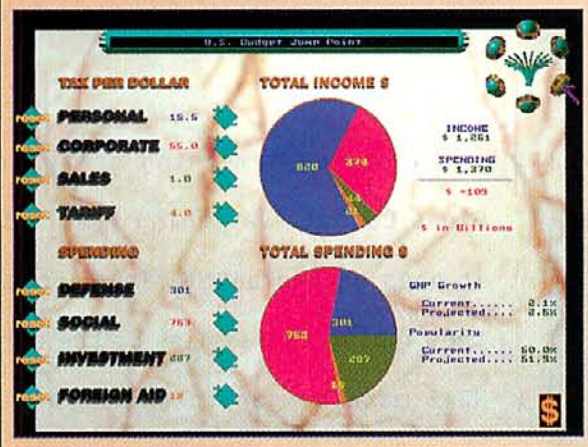
Microsoft

WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO TODAY?™

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The Path To The Oval Office

Wondering how to be a successful president? A good rule of thumb is to start small and work your way up. For instance, if you wish to depose the government of, say, Libya, don't immediately foster a *coup d'etat*, as your probability of success will be low.



IT'S THE ECONOMY, STUPID Money equals success, so make sure you encourage improved relations with powerful economic nations like Japan and Germany.

Instead, spend a few months destabilizing the government and the economy, then have the CIA place a strategic phone call to a general or two. Likewise, if you wish to build your social and economic ties to an allied or neutral country, begin with a low-risk option such as a cultural exchange, then gradually increase aid (if needed) while launching more ambitious initiatives. Of course, there will be exceptions to any rule.

Getting your budget on track and making the U.S. economy grow at better than the usual 2 to 3 percent is crucial to your overall success. For one thing, lower taxes, high growth and a balanced budget will do wonders for your popularity. Also, having extra cash for massive foreign aid projects or increased military spending can make a big difference in the success of your foreign policy.

My usual plan for economic growth involves balancing the budget through military cutbacks and tax increases in the first days of my presidency. Follow up immediately with a global free-trade initiative.

This may cost you a few popularity points, but the election is a long way away, and the resulting economic gains should allow you at least two years of very high growth and significant tax cuts, with money left over. Once the U.S. economy starts to grow fast enough to produce a surplus, channel some money into infrastructure investment, which will, in turn, create even higher growth.

As a result, the CyberJudas scenario opens up new menus and options: You not only counter the traitor's international policy, but also conduct your own internal investigation to root out the Judas. The scenario plays through three phases, each with its own Judas. So even when you catch the first traitor, you don't have a "clean" cabinet.

There are ways to root out the traitor, though. You may burgle his/her office, try to break his/her computer passcode, and launch various other underhanded tricks in pursuit of truth, justice and an election victory. Once you have a suspect in mind, you can take action against the traitor—but be careful, some advisors have tremendous prestige and power and may not be easily removed. Could Ford have fired Kissinger? There are a variety of ways you can undermine the authority of your own cabinet, which hopefully should cut the culprit down to size.

Still, even with traitors crawling all over the White House, I have to question the designer's decision to use this particular strategy to liven up the geopolitical model. Wouldn't it have been easier to provide different world power balances, thus giving the Unites States a few truly external enemies? While I wouldn't want to be the guy who had to reprogram the entire database for the 1960s, thus reincarnating the cold war, surely it wouldn't have been difficult to posit a resurgent Germany, Russia or China?

My disappointment is due, in part, to the strength of the game's modeling of world affairs, and how the U.S. affects them. Not only is a full range of options available, but the best results often come from patient, well-planned strategies that require fairly elaborate sequences of initiatives, as in real life. Conversely, rash military operations are punished fairly heavily, and the armed forces really do become a tool of last resort.

Perhaps this is just a personal quibble, but having so many neat toys seems a waste in such a dull sandbox. Still, whenever a local crisis does erupt, an adventurous president can easily make the world more lively and challenging by setting very ambitious goals and pursuing them aggressively.

A further criticism I have concerns the lack of victory conditions or a scoring system. True, one must get re-elected (or in the case of truly troubled administrations, avoid coups and assassination attempts), but it would be nice to have an additional yardstick against which one could measure each game. (Of course, when playing the CYBERJUDAS scenario, the goal is to catch the traitor, but even here it would be useful and entertaining to have a CIV-like scoring system based on the state of the world at the end of the game.)

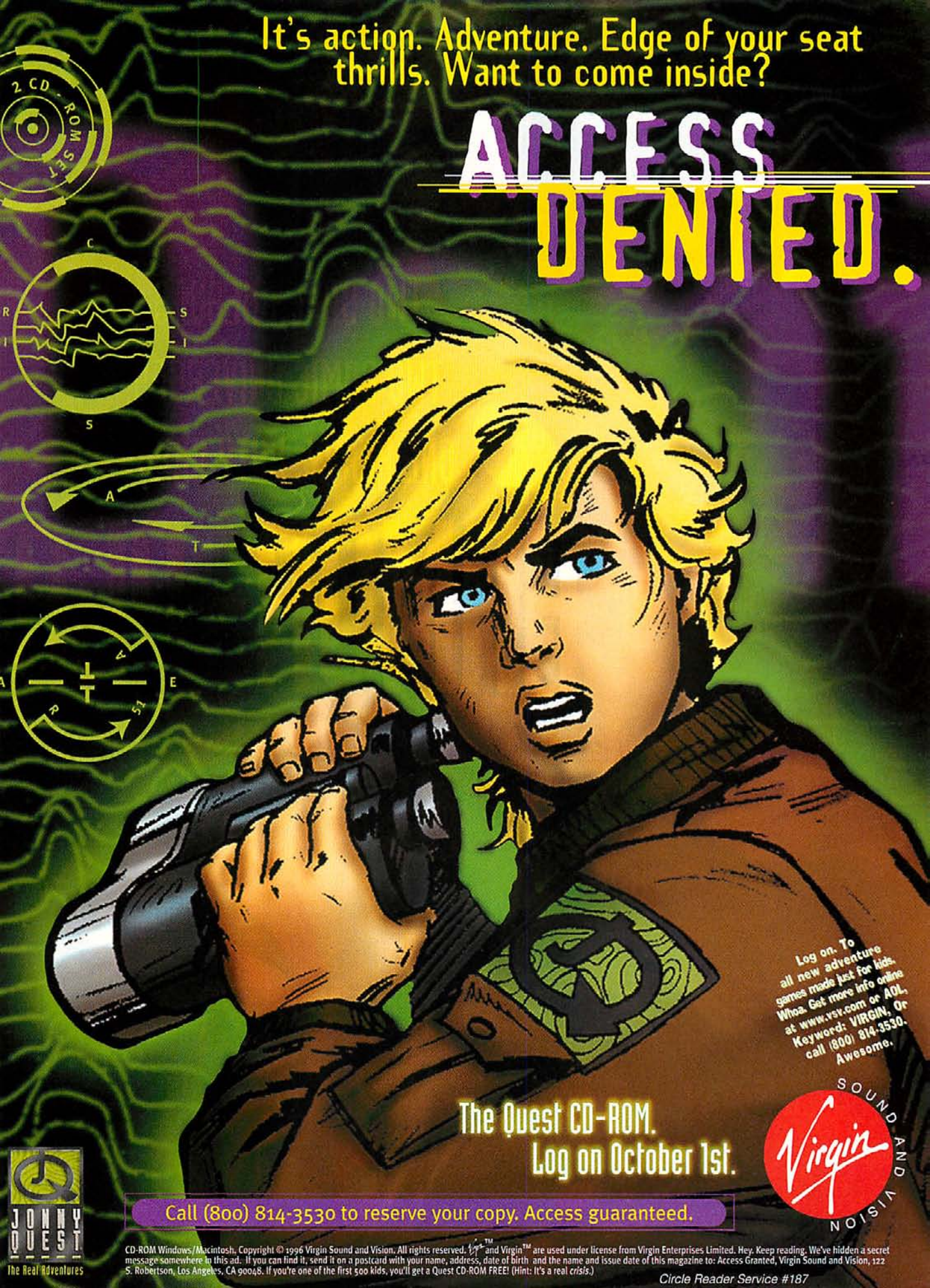
Ultimately, these are but minor complaints. On the whole, CYBERJUDAS delivers what it promises, a detailed and relatively accurate simulation of world politics, with some espionage and backstabbing thrown in to keep the pace moving.

▶APPEAL: For those who'd like to experience the presidency first-hand, students of political science, and Bob Dole.

▶PROS: Highly detailed simulation of geopolitics. The Judas scenario adds suspense and deepens the game.

▶CONS: May be too complex for some gamers; not for the impatient. Benign post-cold war milieu lacks strategic intrigue.

CG RATED


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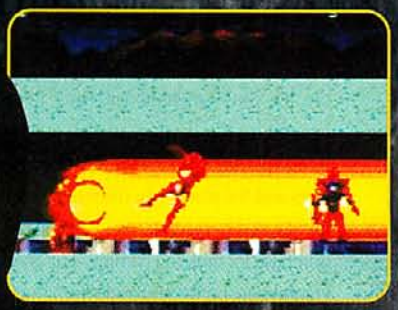




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DOS CD-ROM

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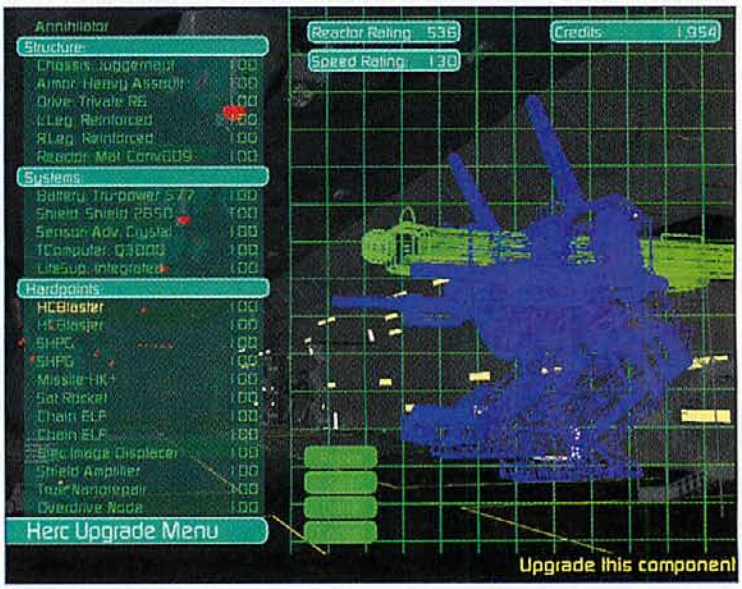
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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Have Herc, Will Travel

Turn-Based Sci-Fi In Sierra's EARTHSIEGE Universe

by Martin E. Cirulis



GRID GAMES CYBERSTORM's wargaming takes place under the pretext of galactic capitalism, as you buy and repair Hercs to both mine for ore and eliminate the rival Cybrids.

Over the past couple of years, Sierra has made two attempts to get in on the Giant Robot craze with their EARTHSIEGE action sims, both of which suffered from direct comparison to the MECHWARRIOR titles. But now, they are the first to get back to the roots of the subgenre with MISSIONFORCE: CYBERSTORM (MFCS), a straight-up tactical wargame based on the subject matter of the action titles. Those with a love for the old *Battletech* board game will be disappointed if they're looking for a computerized version of the venerable game, but those who can get past this fact and play the game for what it is will find a fairly good first attempt at giant robot wargaming.



Price: $54.95
System Requirements: IBM-compatible 486-66, 8 MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM, Mouse, Sound Card, 6 MB hard drive space; supports Windows Sound Cards and 14.4Kbps or higher modem/net play.
of Players: 1-8 (LAN or modem)
Protection: None (CD must be in drive unless Gigantic install is selected)
Developer: Sierra
Publisher: Sierra
Bellevue, WA
(800) 757-7707
Reader Service #: 338

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

MFCS takes place after a human victory in the EARTHSIEGE universe, when mankind has finally gotten back on track to the stars. Unfortunately, your old enemy, the Cybrids, and their giant robot fighting machines, though defeated on Earth, seem to be thriving in the depths of space. You are a military commander in some sort of corporate army composed of Hercs, the human answer to the Cybrid's war machines, and you are basically out there protecting mining interests while beating on the Cybrids. Another major premise change here is that instead of noble humans manning these machines, you get to breed artificial life forms called BioDerms, which are specially designed to link with Hercs and fight more effectively than any mere human could.

You are expected to fight your way through four different star systems, having to destroy the main Cybrid base in each system before moving on to the next. Each group of worlds offers more exotic conditions and more ferocious resistance to the company presence, until you finally destroy the Cybrid home world.

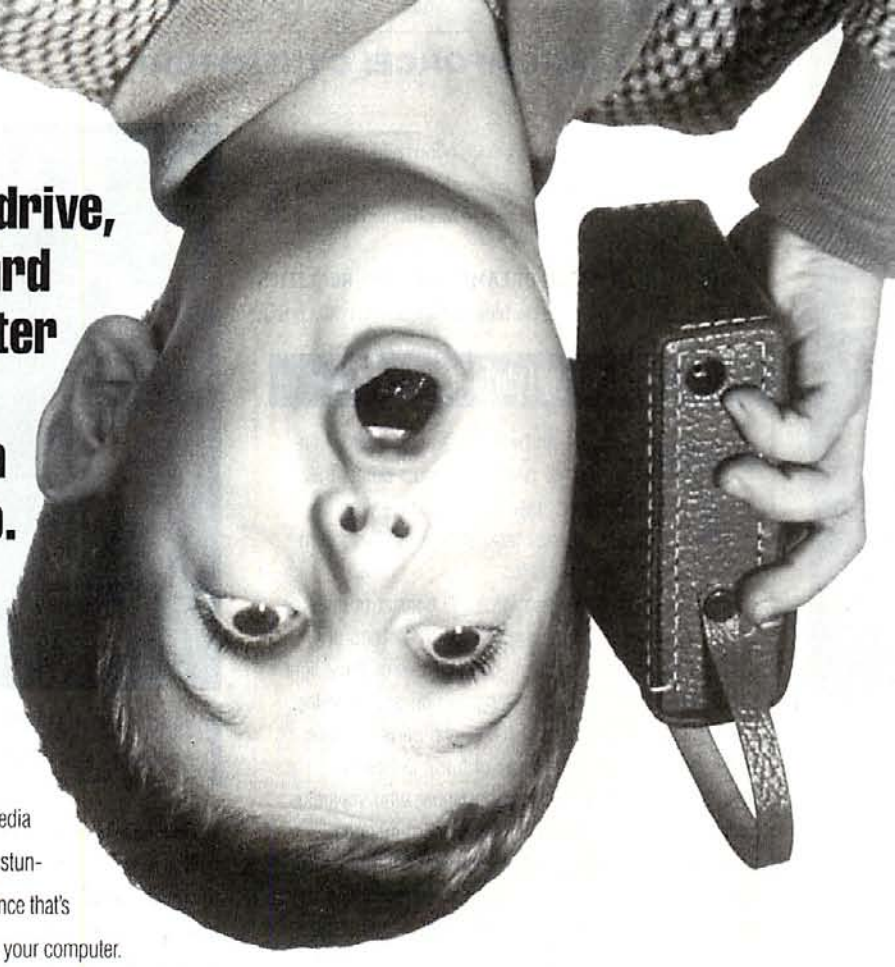
Since you are a company man, everything costs money, which you earn from taking on missions in between your crusades to save humanity from digitization. You will find yourself doing standard military jobs like search-and-destroy or base defense, along with ore mining missions with special digger attachments on your Hercs—not exactly noble work.

IRON MECHS, ORGANIC CIRCUITS

The tactical wargame section of the game takes place on the battlefield, where your Hercs fight and sometimes mine for ore. It is your standard board game interface, with a top-down view; your animated playing pieces resemble tiny miniatures and the planets themselves resemble the stacked hexagon terrain that you can purchase for tabletop gaming. The SVGA graphics are pretty, and aside from that, the combat is further enhanced with unit facings and terrain altitude. Unfortunately, while the altitude of the various hexes comes across nicely, things like trees or water seem painted on the old fashioned way, and it is not always easy to pick the best cover while under enemy fire.

Some of the battles are very interesting, but to be honest, most aren't that tough. Luckily for us consumers, there is built in networking in this title, which allows up to eight armies to take the field against one another—and that gives this game enough legs to make it worthwhile for social gamers, especially since Sierra was smart

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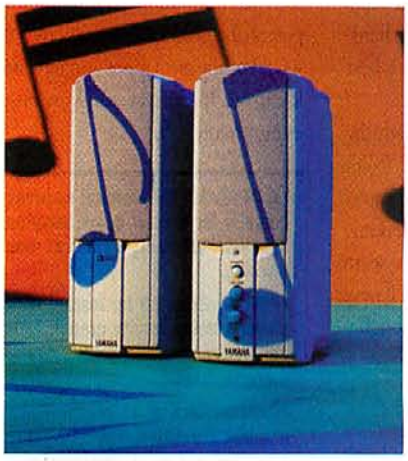
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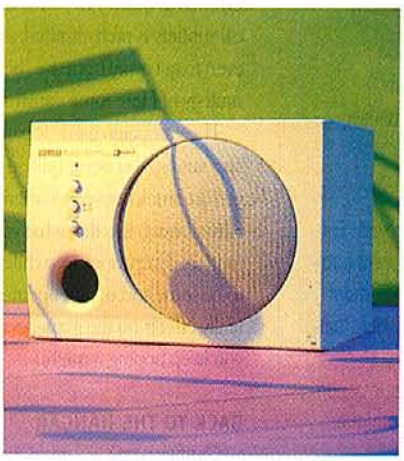
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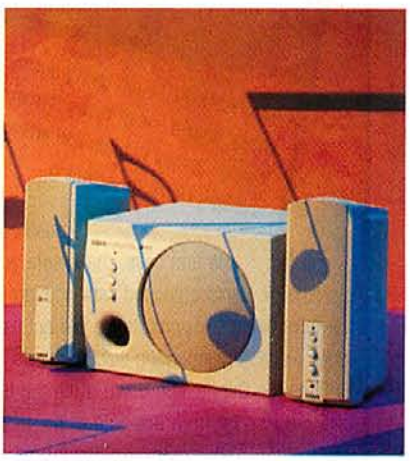
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enough to pack a bonus net-disk in the box, so you can go head-to-head without your friend needing to buy his own full copy.

STEEL DREAMS, RUSTING REALITIES

The problem with CYBERSTORM is that it could have been so much more. Initially, it seems as if it's finally going to be the mech wargame that we have been waiting for—but when you get down to it, it's all just endless fights on endless worlds against endless Cybrids, who fight mainly the same way, in the same machines. I'm afraid what you have here is yet another SF VOID (varies only in degree) title. It never changes, really; you just end up doing the same thing against more and more enemies.

The different mission types, though they seem initially to have different aims and require different styles, almost all boil down to the same thing: "Kill off all the Cybrids as quickly as possible." The tactical subtlety is pretty limited, and it's hard even to get away from the "biggest is best" strategy of Herc force construction.

The campaign game is particularly disappointing. You never quite get the feeling you are stuck between warfare and capitalism, much less that what you are doing matters. Every once in awhile there seems to be some sort of plot update, but it never really effects on the game, even though you keep hoping it might.

BACK TO THE HANGAR

CYBERSTORM is a good game at heart, but it's hobbled by Sierra's desperate attempts to reinvent a basically derivative game. Combine the crucial lack of spark with regard to style and universe with plot elements that never seem to alter the actual battles, and the tedious elements of this game rise to the surface quickly enough that gamers are left with 20 to 40 hours of competent but repetitive SF tactical wargaming and a fun network game for Mech enthusiasts.

The game's most grievous offense, however, is the lack of a paper manual. Online help files are great supplements to a rule book, but it was a fatal mistake to try this "no-paper" stunt with a wargame where tables and charts, which you can leaf through in your off moments in the bathroom, are so important. The lack of a real manual undermines Cyberstorm's potential considerably. I was hoping this would be the great robot wargame we'd like to see. It isn't. Instead, it's just an interesting prototype.



NO HUMANS ALLOWED Though you are supposed to breed artificial BioDerms to pilot your Mechs, all you are doing is buying people and jacking up their stats with money.

▸APPEAL: **This combat strategy game is for fans of quick, easy and light *Battletech*-style tactical robot bashing.**

▸PROS: **Extra CD for instant multiplayer gaming, pretty graphics, the only robot wargame in town.**

▸CONS: **Lack of a manual; repetitive missions; not much challenge to winning.**

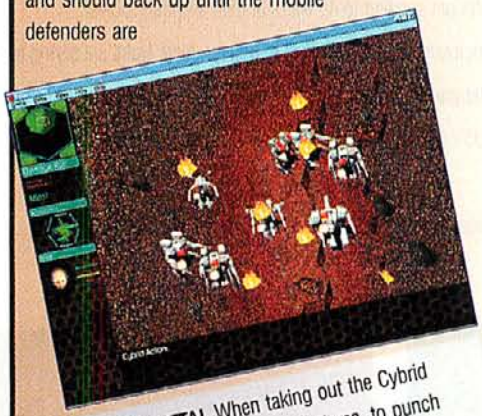
CG RATED

Cracking Cybrid Bases

To move on to the next campaign and eventually win the game, you must defeat the main Cybrid base in a system—by no means an easy task, especially if you commit a couple of basic mistakes.

The proper base-cracking force will consist of three or four of the heaviest Hercs available, with a string of next-best models strung alongside and two or three light scout Hercs to give you long-range vision and targeting.

All Cybrid main bases consist of two parts: a horde of Mechs and a withering array of turret defenses. Victory will always go to the commander who separates these two components and destroys them independently. Advance slowly in a bunched line and draw the defenders to you, where you can concentrate firepower on them without coming under the guns of the static defenses. If you come under withering beam weapon fire from out of sensor range, you're probably too close and should back up until the mobile defenders are mostly destroyed. For the first base, make sure you have a couple of large Hercs equipped with nothing but the most powerful beam weapons; these will act as anti-Herc batteries to destroy incoming suicide-robots.



HEAVY METAL When taking out the Cybrid bases, have a line of heavy Hercs, to punch through enemy Cybrids and artillery batteries, and light Hercs for scouting.

Once the Cybrids are down, rush the turrets in a concentrated wedge from one side of the base to another, and victory is yours with minimal losses.

The only other things you need to keep in mind are these: shields forward, use what terrain there is, and crouch your Hercs at the end of their turns.

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Crushing The Orcs

How To Lead The Humans To Victory In Beyond The Dark Portal

by Elliott Chin



WarCraft II, while not exceedingly difficult, certainly was a challenge to beat. The expansion set, though, is another story. Beyond The Dark Portal is much tougher than the regular game, and the scenarios will try the patience of even the most advanced WarCraft players. This issue, we'll give you strategies for finally eliminating the Orcish threat and destroying the Orc home world of Draenor. If you want to tackle the even tougher Orc campaign to unite the clans and win back Azeroth, check out next month's Orc walk-through.



TIP! At the mountain pass in Scenario 4, lure the Warsong defenders into an ambush so you have a clear path to the towers for your Dwarven demolition squads.

The first human act in the expansion set isn't a cakewalk by any means, but it isn't as difficult as the later three acts. If you do find the scenarios too hard to beat, turn to the CGW website (www.zd.com/gaming) for a walk-through of Act I. The true test of your mettle, though, lies beyond the Dark Portal.

"DRAENOR, THE RED WORLD"

In Scenario 4, you enter Draenor

Cracking The Orc Base

In all scenarios, you'll eventually have to destroy or conquer several Orc villages. Here's the skinny on how to use combined arms to crack well-fortified camps in Beyond the Dark Portal, the original WarCraft II, or even multiplayer matches. Next month we'll provide defensive strategies for thwarting invasions.

1. First, use Gnomish flying machines to uncover the map and find out where the Orc camps are, how many troops they have, how the camps are laid out, and where the towers are. Then, keep the flying machines close to the Orc villages so you can monitor Orcish activity and watch your own troops when you move in. Flying machines stationed beyond your borders also give you advance warning of incoming enemy units. If you have the magic, invisible knights or flying machines also make great scouts, as they can run into enemy territory without detection. The paladin's holy vision spell is also good for recon.



ICE STORM A devastating tactic in camp invasion is to have a line of footmen stand ground with several mages behind them. Then, when the Orcs come to beat on the line, cast blizzard spells at the edge of the Orcs to wipe them out.

2. After you've scouted the enemy camp, take out the towers. Use Dwarven demolition squads to destroy those towers at the edge of the enemy camp. Make sure, though, that you have flying machines scouting the path that the Dwarves will be taking. If there are troops in the way, eliminate them, and then send in the Dwarves. Against those towers protected by walls or located in the middle of the camp, use ballistas. Make sure that you escort them with a force of footmen or gryphons though, because they have weak armor. Ballistas are most effective when you double (or triple) them up, as a group will be able to destroy a tower instantly.

3. Mages with blizzard spells are also good for decimating towers or Orc troops. Just make

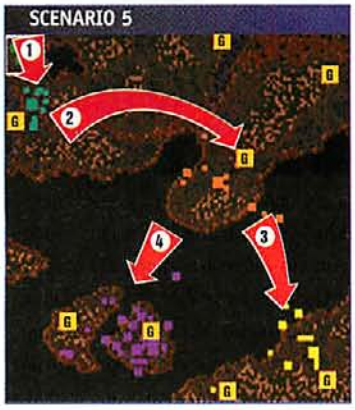


through the Dark Portal. To the west through a mountain pass lies the Warsong Clan (red). Destroy it quickly (be wary of the towers), and build your first camp here, peppering it with many guard towers to protect against dragons. Then send a force of peasants, elves and footmen south to find the second gold mine, which is guarded by a daemon. Destroy it with the elves and build a second camp. Set up guard and cannon towers near this second gold mine to kill incoming peons, as another Orc nation will be trying to use this gold mine as well. After you've built a large (20- to 30-man) army, move in an arc east and then north to take out the other Orcs.

In **Scenario 5**, move south to destroy the small Orc village there and build your own camp. While building your town hall, gather your knights, footmen, elves and ballista into a nine-strong party. Send this group eastward along the southern coastline. Once you find the two towers guarding entry into the Bleeding Hollow Orc camp (orange), have your ballista take out the towers from afar. With that done, send the entire force southward into the peninsula and destroy the camp. After you have secured this area with several towers guarding all possible entry points to the camp, start building a town hall and a shipyard or two. There are also two more gold mines on this landmass for the taking. Just remember to station towers nearby for defense. With three or four of your bases established and your shipyards finishing up construction, all you need to do is construct an adequate navy of subs and battleships to destroy the enemy shipyards.



TIP! Using this formation and a knight decoy, you can lure the Warsong defenders to their death before you invade the Orc camp.



Scenario 6 is incredibly difficult, but there are two means of winning. You can load up all troops into your transports and send them, along with the warships, southeast to Bleeding Hollow Clan (orange) immediately. Make sure you use your warships to clear the shore of any towers and ships before unloading your troops at the northern shore of Bleeding Hollow. Then, using the base-cracking tactics in the sidebar, decimate the camp quickly. Every orange-colored building, including the Bleeding Hollow oil platform, must be sure you guard them with gryphons or a line of footmen. The good thing about gryphons is that all ground units, except for trolls, will actually turn tail and run from a gryphon, so they won't even touch your mage.

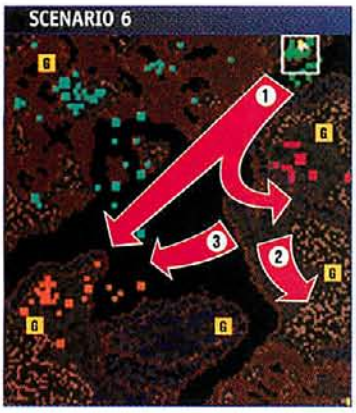
4. After the towers, you will have to deal with any death knights the enemy has. You can either cast invisibility on a paladin and send him deep into enemy territory to exorcise a death knight, or, if you have enough mages, send in a group of three or four invisible footmen to do the dirty work. Keep in mind that death knights can still detect invisible paladins. You can also simply rush a death knight with your footmen once he has exhausted his spells.

5. The actual invasion force should consist of at least two nine-unit waves, half of which should be composed of footmen and knights for the heavy-duty melee, with the majority of the other half consisting of archers for support and several mages for special attacks. Take out enemy barracks first, then kill all the peons, and afterward, move to the Orc stronghold. If the camp has towers deep within, take along at least two ballistas with their own dedicated footman escort. Never group Dwarves with your attack formation; if they explode next to your troops, they'll take them out too. You'll be in good shape if you attack with at least numerical parity, upgraded troops, and units grouped together to attack single Orc units one by one.

6. Gryphons are great for taking out cannon towers, buildings, ships and ground units, but have them attack targets away from your main force because their thunderbolts will also harm nearby friendly units.

7. If you're invading coastal camps, use Gnomish submarines to take out any Orcish ships lying near shore, unless they are within watch of a tower. In that case, use gryphons or battleships to destroy these vessels and any cannon towers on shore. Warships can also be used to bombard and clear the shore before you unload your troops.

8. Lastly, keep in mind three crucial things. First, upgrade your stronghold and units as quickly as possible. Second, don't stay on the defensive too long, because the longer you wait, the more entrenched the computer enemy will become. Strike as soon as you've amassed a large army. Third, if your first wave doesn't do the job, keep cranking out the troops; victory takes time.



destroyed before you can load Danath and Turalyon back onto your transports to be taken back to the Circle of Power.

Alternatively, you can defeat this scenario by taking over the Warsong Clan camp (red) in the southeast continent and setting up two gold bases on the landmass. Make sure the first structures you build after town halls are lumber mills and guard towers to fend off the frequent dragon attacks. You should then be able to build a sizable army in relative comfort. Have plenty of archers in both bases to defend against invaders, and once you've mustered a large enough army, board them onto transports and sail to Bleeding Hollow to the west.

Only attack Bleeding Hollow Clan. They are your scenario objective, so don't bother with Shadowmoon (black) to the south and Bonechewer (green) to the north. Not only are you no match for all three clans, you'll waste valuable resources discovering this fact.

"WAR IN THE SHADOWS"

The mission to slay the monstrous Deathwing is **Scenario 7**. Don't lose your transports; they are the only ones you'll get. Load up the transports, sail due east, and unload once you hit land. Then move towards the Orc camp to destroy it quickly and free the large party of good warriors held behind walls. Group the archers together and be ready to jump to your destroyers, because dragons will soon attack by land and sea. Raise a small camp with a shipyard and start building destoyers. Once you've built four, load up your transports and send the expedition northeasterly along the shores of the northern land mass, hugging the coast. Don't even try to take on the Shattered Hand navy (white); simply try to distract any warships long enough for your troops to disembark. Once ashore, you'll have to fight a minor battle against Warsong warriors (red) to secure the beachhead, but it should be relatively easy. Then, follow the maze of mountains to where Kurdran and his Gryphon, Sky'ree, are being held. Do not charge through this maze, but send invisible knights to scout ahead. There are many skeletons and Orc troops lying in wait, and Kurdran himself is guarded by



many undead and several towers. Use Khadgar's spells and the paladins' exorcisms to soften up the opposition; also rest periodically for healing via your paladins.

After you free Kurdran, have him lure Deathwing to your waiting archers. Make Khadgar cast a slow spell on the dragon to prevent his escape, and then order your elves and Kurdran to tear into him.

For **Scenario 8**, send your Gnomish flying machine to scout west across the sea, where you'll find the Shattered Hand stronghold (white). Have your battleship destroy the single tower guarding passage into the camp, and then unload your troops from your transport at the forest opening. There are two towers inside the camp, so send your two dwarves to destroy them. Have your troops move in to take out the settlement, and then raise your own camp. Explore the whole island and you'll find another gold mine. Build a second hall quickly, and make sure you erect several towers at key entry points to ensure adequate defense. Have a mix of cannon towers on shore to destroy juggernauts and guard towers for dragons. Build a shipyard and several destroyers, and escort an oil tanker to build an oil platform just southeast of your camp. Also southeast is an island with an additional gold mine. Take it when needed, though you'll have to clear the island of trees before you have space to build a town hall. With all your gold mines secured, start cranking on the war production. From there, it's a matter of whittling the enemy Orcs down with Gryphon harassment, submarine attacks and then a full-scale invasion of the other two Orc camps far south.



In **Scenario 9**, first travel eastward toward the Bonechewer clan (green) with all your troops, except for two footmen. Do not attack the town, but instead go slightly north of it, skirting the Bonechewer towers, to free the prisoners in a walled prison north of the camp. Use the ballista you freed to take out the Bonechewer towers, and then take the settlement. When you send your troops to do this, also have your peasants build just a town hall and lumber mill at the first gold mine you passed on the way east, which is located at the bottom middle of the map. Then surround this compound with farms and guard towers. Use this location only as a gold depot. The Bonechewer camp should be your true base. After Bonechewer is secured, send a few peasants



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there to set up your real base, build up a large army and attack Shattered Hand (white). Then, when you have gryphons, mages and paladins, attack north and take out the Shadowmoon clan (black). Use dwarves and ballistas to take out the towers and have invisible footmen hunt down the death knights.

If you still need more gold to defeat Shadowmoon, there is a third gold mine northwest of your camp, just south of the mountain range. Remember that you only need to destroy Shadowmoon's compound. Ignore the Warsong Clan (red) to your east.

"THE MEASURE OF VALOR"

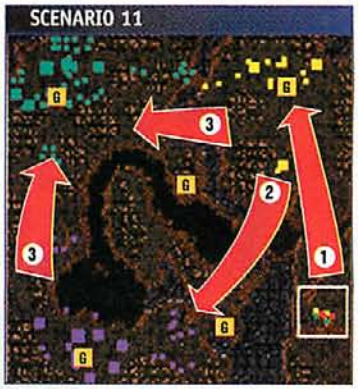
The objectives for **Scenario 10** tell you to hold out till the Orc forces withdraw, but waiting will get you nowhere; you have to attack. Securing additional gold mines isn't a priority here, but build extra camps if you can. Make sure you fortify your northern camp border with guard and cannon towers and a few footmen.



With that border secured, attack the Shattered Hand clan (white) in the far southwest. Shattered Hand has death knights, though, so upgrade your knights to paladins before you get there. After Shattered Hand, move northeast to take out Bonechewer Clan (green). Thunderlord (violet) lies north, on an island, and if you destroy this camp late in the game, you can pretty much wipe it out with Gryphons.

In a surprising twist, you get to command the Laughing Skull Orc Clan in **Scenario 11**; they lie directly north of your starting position. Your first task should be to preserve your paladins and their healing powers, since the Orcs have no analogous ability. Next, build up a line of towers behind a line of farms for protection from the west.

When you have dragons and sappers, take them and a wave of troops southeast to destroy the Thunderlord Clan (violet). These Orcs have death knights, so send in fodder, such as a grunt, to make them waste their death coil power, and then chase them with dragons. This camp should be easy, and afterwards you can move up north from the Thunderlord site



to strike at Bonechewer (green).

The very last of the human missions is **Scenario 12**. This scenario appears hopelessly lost from the outset, as your meager forces start the scenario by being massacred by a huge Orcish horde. Quickly take the three peons next to your castle in the middle of the map and bring them down to your southeast camp. Have them build three additional towers at your camp's defensive wall for added protection against the inevitable horde.

At the same time, in the north, break yourself out of the mountain walls with your Dwarven demolition squad, then group all your units together and move them south into Clan Warsong's camp (red). Have Khadgar rain icicles on the nearest tower you encounter, hopefully catching several Orcs in the blizzard as well. Keep Kurdran close, and have your units stand ground so they don't run off and get massacred one by one. Without any ballistas or Dwarves, you'll have to order Kurdran to destroy the cannon towers. Alleria has better range than guard towers, so have her



destroy those. As soon as you clear away the towers and destroy the camp, send in two peasants to set up a camp here. Build lots of towers first though, preferably four or five, because dragons and the remnants of the horde will come to attack occasionally. Once this base has been firmly established, build an additional barrack and start churning out troops.

The Shattered Hand Clan guards the Dark Portal, which lies to your southwest enclosed behind a line of walls. After you've taken out the Shattered Hand towers with Dwarves, and once you have an army of rangers and knights, escort Khadgar to the dark portal. Only Khadgar can destroy the portal, so use the other troops as guards against encroaching Orc units, and have peasants build several towers to shoot down dragons and incoming troops.

With this final victory, you will at last secure freedom and peace for Azeroth, ending the savage threat of the Orcs once and for all...or at least until WARCRAFT III.



THE END GAME In Scenario 12, take this western pass into Warsong territory (the clan's northern border is better defended), to destroy the village and build a second base.

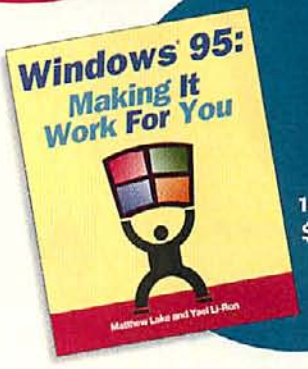
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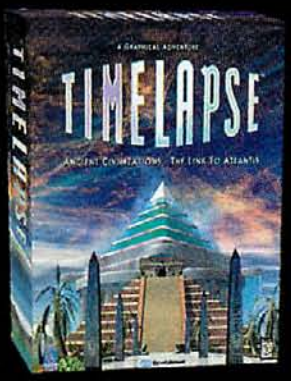
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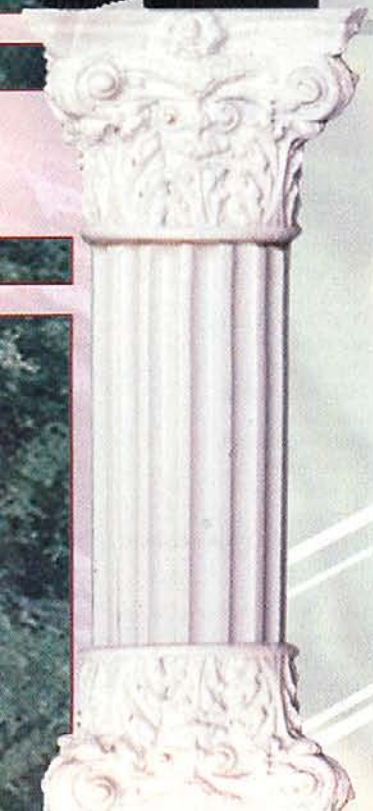
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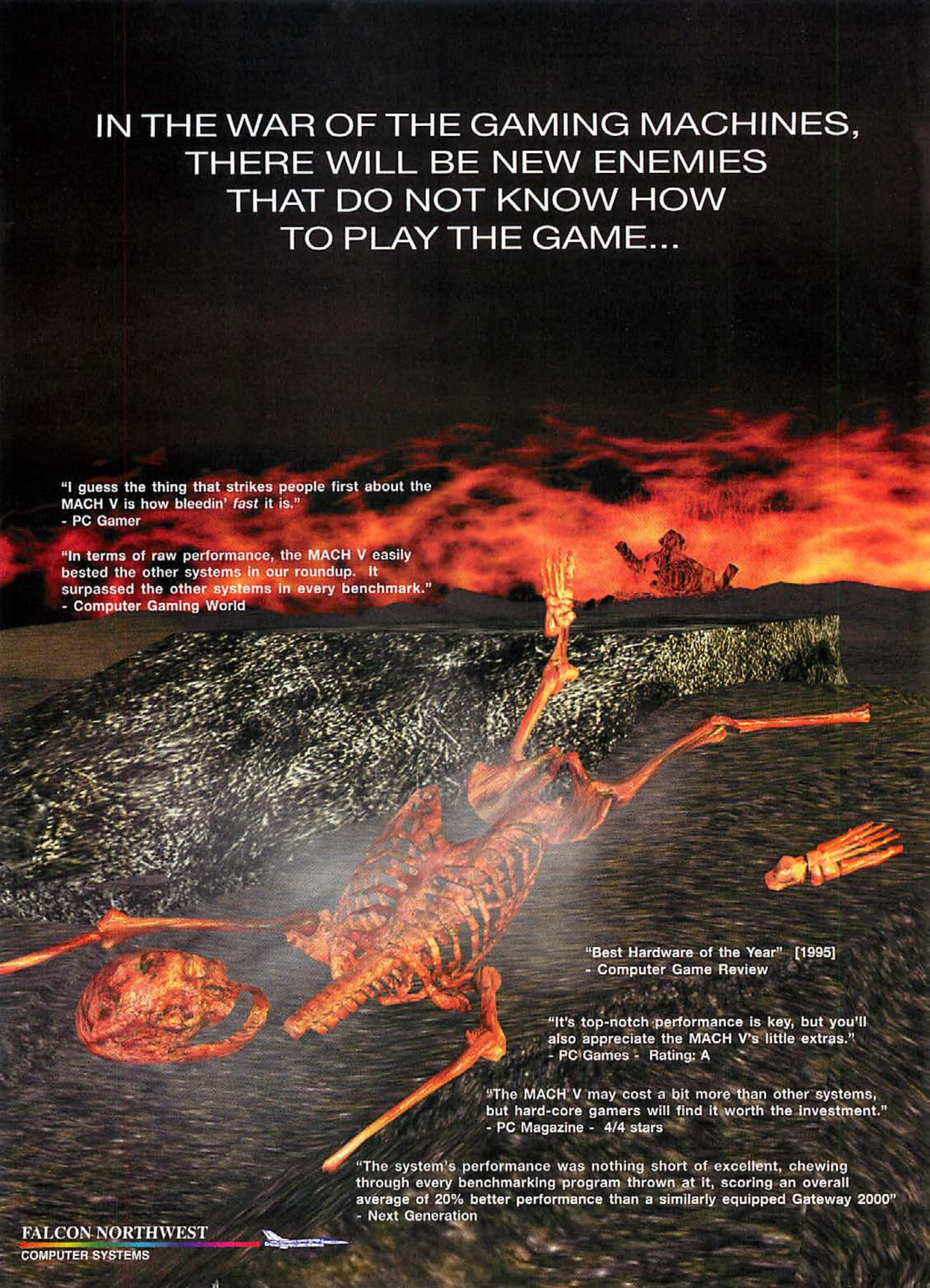
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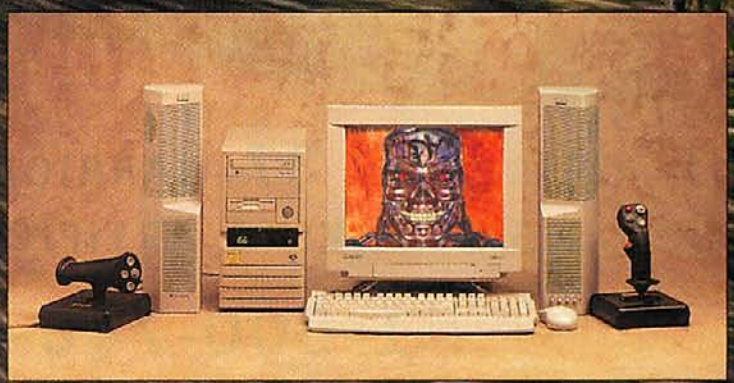
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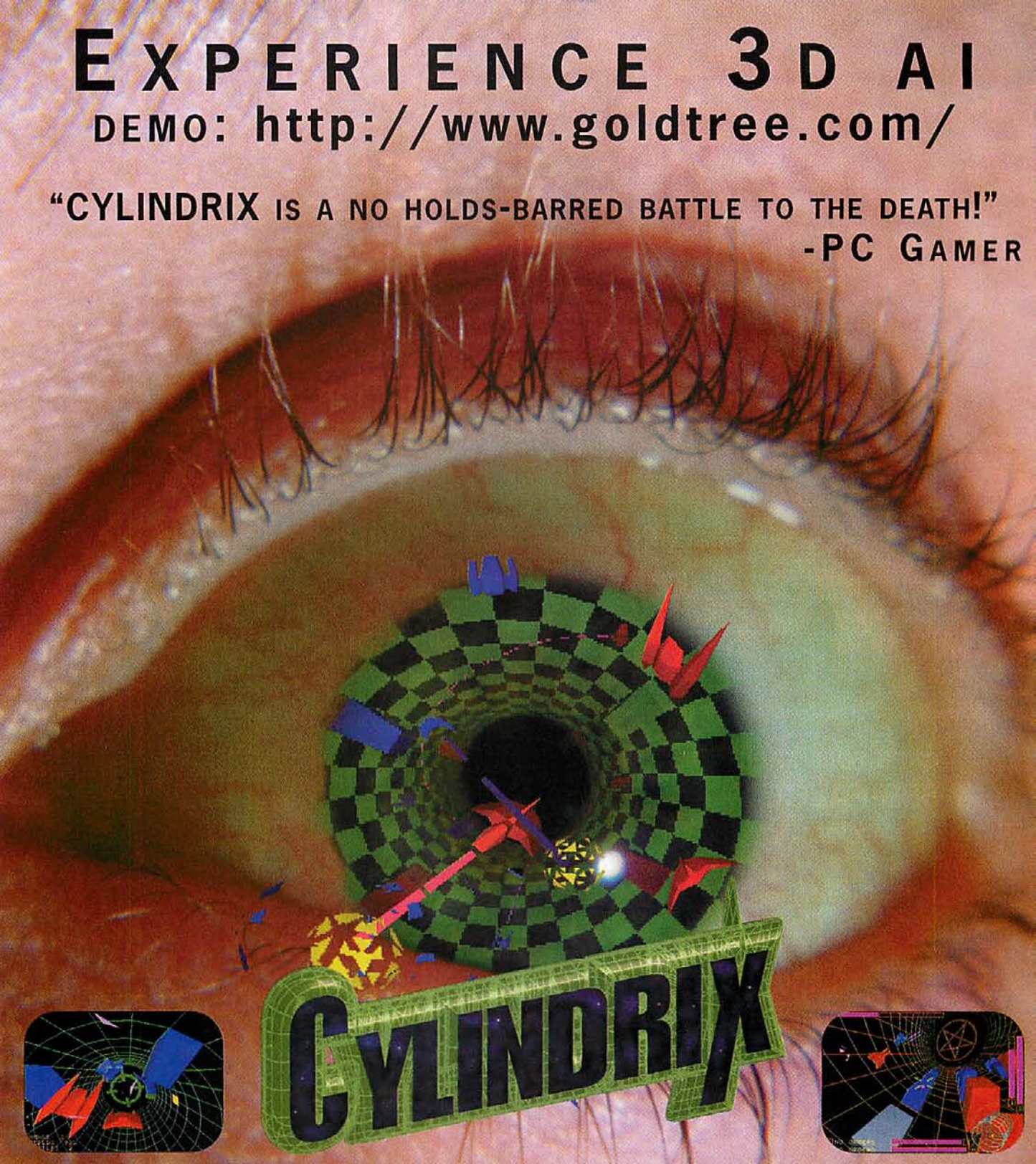
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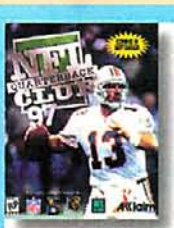
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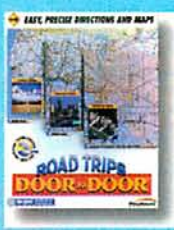


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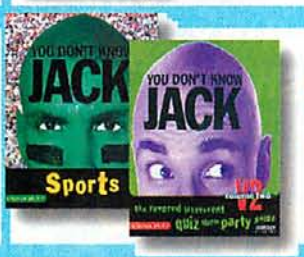
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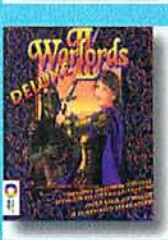
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CHESSMASTER

Mindscape/Software Toolworks, 1986

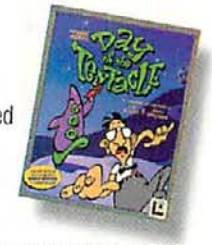


The only chess program in the *CGW* Hall of Fame, CHESSMASTER is the Cadillac of castling. Every game in the series has improved upon the design, adding new features without sacrificing what has made the line so successful. Recent additions include advice given in digitized speech, SVGA graphics and improved sound support. For the chess enthusiast, the myriad of classic games, the easy-to-use interface and variety of chess problems provide entertainment for players of all skill levels. The current version, CHESSMASTER 5000 (see September 96 issue), offers over five dozen opponents, many based on great chess grandmasters throughout the ages. From the classic attacks of Boris Spassky and Garry Kasparov to the tough defense of Anatoly Karpov to the near-effortless mobility of 19th-century American champion Paul Morphy, all the portrayals are unique (each GM opponent even employs the appropriate historical opening repertoire), giving the gamer a steady stream of fresh opponents.

When you toss in the multimedia chess tour, the archives of great tournaments and classic chess matchups, it's hard to find fault with the CHESSMASTER series–whether you're interested in exploiting backward pawns, launching queenside majority attacks, or just playing an enjoyable and challenging game of chess. CHESSMASTER truly deserves its status as the Game of Kings.

DAY OF THE TENTACLE

LucasArts, 1993



When the zany team of Dave Grossman and Tim Schafer created the script for DAY OF THE TENTACLE, they had one goal in mind—to create the interactive equivalent of a Chuck Jones cartoon. They succeeded so well in their mixture of crazy dialogue and offbeat sight gags that by the time they showed DAY OF THE TENTACLE to their idol (Jones is arguably the king of the classic Warner Brothers cartoon directors), he was impressed enough to try to hire artists Peter Chan and Larry Ahern out from under the project. Fortunately, the artists stayed aboard; the animation team created smooth-flowing sequences that some game designers had always said could *not* be done; Richard Saunders (*WKRP In Cincinnati*'s Les Nesman) led the voiceover actors in a series of clever performances; and the script from Grossman and Schafer kept gamers full of both challenge and laughter from start to finish. DAY OF THE TENTACLE was supposed to be a sequel to MANIAC MANSION, Lucasfilm Games' first game as publisher instead of developer. DOTT even used the same set of tools as MANIAC MANSION, the SCUMM engine (for Story Creation Utility for MANIAC MANSION), but today DAY OF THE TENTACLE is better known and better loved than the game that spawned LucasArts' successful string of graphic adventure games.

Inductees Prior To 1989

- **BATTLE CHESS** (Interplay Productions, 1988)
- **CHESSMASTER** (The Software Toolworks, 1986)
- **DUNGEON MASTER** (FTL SOFTWARE, 1987)
- **EARL WEAVER BASEBALL** (Electronic Arts, 1986)
- **EMPIRE** (Interstel, 1978)
- **F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER** (MicroProse, 1988)
- **GETTYSBURG: THE TURNING POINT** (SSI, 1986)
- **KAMPFGRUPPE** (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
- **MECH BRIGADE** (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
- **MIGHT & MAGIC** (New World Computing, 1986)
- **M.U.L.E.** (Electronic Arts, 1983)
- **PIRATES** (MicroProse, 1987)
- **SIMCITY** (Maxis, 1987)
- **STARFLIGHT** (Electronic Arts, 1986)
- **THE BARD'S TALE** (Electronic Arts, 1985)
- **ULTIMA III** (Origin Systems, 1983)
- **ULTIMA IV** (Origin Systems, 1985)
- **WAR IN RUSSIA** (Strategic Simulations, 1984)
- **WASTELAND** (Interplay Productions, 1986)
- **WIZARDRY** (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)
- **ZORK** (Infocom, 1981)

Modern Inductees

- **ALONE IN THE DARK** (I-Motion, 1992)
- **BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR** (Dynamix, 1993)
- **DAY OF THE TENTACLE** (LucasArts, 1993)
- **DOOM** (id Software, 1993)
- **FALCON 3.0** (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)
- **FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO** (Dynamix, 1993)
- **GUNSHIP** (MicroProse, 1989)
- **HARPOON** (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)
- **KING'S QUEST V** (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
- **LEMMINGS** (Psygnosis, 1991)
- **LINKS 386 PRO** (Access Software, 1992)
- **M-1 TANK PLATOON** (MicroProse, 1989)
- **MASTER OF ORION** (MicroProse, 1993)
- **RAILROAD TYCOON** (MicroProse, 1990)
- **RED BARON** (Dynamix, 1990)
- **SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION** (MicroProse, 1991)
- **THEIR FINEST HOUR** (LucasArts, 1989)
- **THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND** (LucasArts, 1990)
- **TIE FIGHTER** (LucasArts, 1994)
- **ULTIMA VI** (Origin Systems, 1990)
- **ULTIMA UNDERWORLD** (Origin Systems, 1992)
- **WING COMMANDER I & II** (Origin Systems, 1990-91)
- **WOLFENSTEIN 3-D** (id Software, 1992)
- **X:COM** (MicroProse, 1994)

Computer game programs have grown so massive and the number of hardware configurations has become so huge that incompatibilities and glitches are frustratingly common. Software fixes, or "patches," for buggy programs have become a necessary evil, and will be until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs.

The 11th Hour 2.42 Beta Update: Beta update to the video player. To install, just place this new version of v32.exe into your 11th Hour directory. This player is supposed to improve video performance on low-end machines and correct sound choppiness. Note that this patch is still in beta, so there is no "official" support until all the bugs have been worked out, but Virgin/Trilobyte has made it available for use.

Aliens V1.0.3: General patch update. To run it, read the detailed instructions in readme.txt, but here's a quick rundown: Simply run the alien103.exe file, and then run the game from your hard drive, *not* from the disc.

Descent II V1.1: A general update file with many fixes. To install, unzip the d2ptch11.zip to get the d2ptch11.exe, and then run the .exe file, which will install the patch for you.

EF2000 Midlife Upgrade V2.02: A patch that balances the campaign, with improved AI for both the enemy and your wingman. Run the patchef.exe file to use.

IndyCar Racing II For Windows 95 V1.01: A general update file that includes fixes for system crash while exiting and modem play bugs. Copy this file into your c:\sierra\icr2 directory, run the w95icr11.exe. file, and finally run the patch.exe command.

Jagged Alliance V1.13: Has various corrections, modifications, fixes, and extras. To install, unzip the ja_113.zip file into your Jagged Alliance directory, and then run ja.exe.

NHL '96 patch: General patch file for NHL '96. Delete and then reinstall the game to ensure a clean install. Then run the nhl96.exe file in the c:\nhl96 directory, and let it overwrite the suggested files.

Riddle Of Master Lu V2.05: A general patch file with the following major revisions: skippy/jumpy mouse pointer has been fixed, easier access to the smoking hutch, and the "player_enter _scene" error has been fixed. Copy the new riddle.exe to the appropriate directory (either c:\riddle or c:\games\riddle) and overwrite the old one.

Steel Panthers V1.2: A whole slew of fixes, modifications, and clarifications. Read the readme.txt file to see them all. Copy all the files in the .ZIP file to your Steel Panthers directory and let it overwrite the old ones.

Top Gun: Fire At Will V1.1: A general patch file that fixes a few problems. Examples include various crash problems, easier missile dodging, harder gun kills, accurate fuel usage model, and a KEY file for the Suncom F-15E joystick. To install the patch, run the tgv11.exe file in your Top Gun directory, and then type "install" to install the patches. Afterwards, type "clean" to get rid of the unnecessary patch files after installation.

Tony La Russa '96 Patch Disk (Beta): This patch fixes a few bugs, but is still in beta. If you still want to use it, simply place the tony96.zip file into your c:\tony96 director. Then unzip the file and let it overwrite the necessary files.

Virtual Snooker V1.1: Fixes a few bugs in modem play, and also modifies the Windows setup routine. Just unzip the snkr_us.zip file in the directory where Virtual Snooker was installed, and let it overwrite the necessary files.

Warcraft 2 V1.2: Updates version 1.0 to 1.2. Includes war2kali.exe for netplay using Kali, and the shareware version of Kali. Also has IPX network code optimized for better performance; fixes the Exorcism spell problem; also fixes the error that occurs when 255 or more PUD files are in the war2 directory. Just unzip the wc2_12.zip file and run the resulting .exe file to install the patch.

Worms Network Fix: A simple patch file that will fix network play. Just unzip the wormscdn.zip file, and then copy the resulting wrms.exe to your Worms directory. This update is for the CD version only, the floppy version's update is a different file.



▸ New Patches are on disk.

ZDNet

These patches can usually be downloaded from the major online networks (CompuServe, GEnie, ZDNet) and *Computer Gaming World*'s Web site (http://www.zdnet.com/gaming), but can also be obtained from individual software publishers' Web sites or direct from the publisher with proof of purchase.

Publisher Web Sites

Many of these patches are available directly from the publishers, at the following sites:

Accolade: http://www.accolade.com
Activision: http://www.activision.com
Apogee/3d Realms: http://www.apogee1.com
Bethesda: http://www.bethsoft.com
Blizzard: http://www.blizzard.com/tech.htm
Bullfrog: http://www.ea.com/bullfrog.html
Domark: http://www.domark.com
EA: http://www.ea.com
Id Software: http://www.idsoftware.com
Interactive Magic: http://www.imagicgames.com/games.html
Interplay: http://www.interplay.com
Looking Glass: http://www.vie.com/lgt/utility.html
LucasArts: http://www.lucasarts.com
MicroProse: http://www.microprose.com/mpsfiles.html
Microsoft: http://www.microsoft.com
Mindscape: http://www.mindscape.com
New World Computing: http://www.nwcomputing.com
Ocean: http://www.ef2000.com
Origin: http://www.ea.com/origin.english/index.html
Papyrus: http://www.sierra.com
Philips: http://spider.media.philips.com/media/games
Sierra On-Line: http://www.sierra.com
Spectrum HoloByte: http://www.trek.microprose.com/shfiles.html
SSI: http://www.ssionline.com
Take 2: http://westol.com/~taketwo/ripper.html#patches
Virgin: http://www.vie.com/html/viesupport.html

THE COMPUTER GAMING POLL • A MONTHLY SURVEY OF CGW SUBSCRIBERS

Each month, 2,000 "lucky" *CGW* subscribers are selected at random to rate 100 computer games. The results of that poll are calculated into the aggregate results of previous months to yield a cumulative average for the best plays in gaming. We've converted to a new system, so rankings are likely to be more dynamic than in recent months, and some Top 10 categories don't include a full 10 games. As more responses accrue, the rankings will stabilize and all the slots will fill in. In the meantime, we hope you find the new ratings race as fascinating as we do.



TOP ACTION GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Duke Nukem 3-D	Apogee/FormGen	8.66
2	Crusader: No Remorse	EA/Origin	8.33
3	Dark Forces	LucasArts	7.90
4	Doom II	id Software	7.88
5	System Shock	EA/Origin	7.87
6	Descent II	Interplay	7.80
7	The Need For Speed	EA	7.69
8	Hexen	id/Raven	7.65
9	Earthworm Jim: ... Can O' Worms	Playmates Interactive	7.62
10	Virtual Pool	Interplay	7.38



TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Gabriel Knight 2	Sierra	8.37
2	Zork Nemesis	Activision	8.02
3	Spycraft	Activision	8.00
4	Mission Critical	Legend	7.71
5	Full Throttle	LucasArts	7.50
6	Phantasmagoria	Sierra	7.37
7	The Dig	LucasArts	7.36
8	Under A Killing Moon	Access	7.33
9	Riddle Of Master Lu	Sanctuary Woods	7.24
10	Ripper	Take 2	7.21



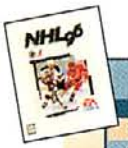
TOP CLASSIC/PUZZLE GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	You Don't Know Jack	Berkeley Systems	8.08
2	Incredible Toons	Sierra	7.23
3	Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	7.16
4	Tritryst	Virgin	6.86
5	Monopoly	Virgin/Westwood	6.77
6	Connections	Discovery Channel	6.71
7	Lemmings 3D	Psygnosis	6.18
8	Treasure Quest	Sirius	5.50
9	Gearheads	Philips	5.36
10	Smart Games	Smart Games	4.00



TOP SIMULATION/SPACE COMBAT GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Wing Commander IV	EA/Origin	8.72
2	Mechwarrior 2	Activision	8.45
3	AH-64 Longbow	EA/Origin	8.39
4	Wing Commander 3	EA/Origin	8.34
5	Advanced Tactical Fighters	EA	8.14
6	EF2000	Ocean	8.13
7	Silent Hunter	SSI/Mindscape	8.03
8	U-Boat II: Drumbeat	Deadly Games	8.00
9	U.S. Marine Fighters	EA	7.94
10	Nascar Racing	Papyrus	7.79



TOP SPORTS GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	NHL Hockey 96	EA Sports	8.13
2	FPS Football Pro 96	Sierra	7.74
3	NBA Live '95	EA Sports	7.70
4	Tony LaRussa 3 '96	Stormfront Studios	7.69
5	PGA Tour Golf 486	EA Sports	7.64
6	NBA Live '96	EA Sports	7.61
7	FPS Football 95	Sierra	7.46
8	Hardball 5	Accolade	7.25
9	Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball	Acclaim	7.00
10	FPS Baseball 94	Sierra	6.82



TOP STRATEGY GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	WarCraft II	Blizzard	9.01
2	WarCraft II Expansion Set	Blizzard	8.97
3	Civilization II	MicroProse	8.88
4	Command & Conquer	Virgin/Westwood	8.59
5	C & C: Covert Operations	Virgin/Westwood	8.56
6	Heroes of Might & Magic	New World Computing	8.15
7	Master of Magic	MicroProse	8.09
8	Fit Commander 2: Mission Builder	Avalon Hill	8.00
9	WarCraft	Blizzard	7.82
10	Jagged Alliance	Sir-Tech	7.80



TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen	New World Computing	7.62
2	Anvil of Dawn	New World Computing	7.51
3	Stonekeep	Interplay	7.18
4	Ravenloft: Stone Prophet	SSI/Mindscape	6.94
5	Death Gate	Legend	6.77
6	Wolf	Sanctuary Woods	6.21
7	—		
8	—		
9	—		
10	—		



TOP WARGAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Steel Panthers	SSI/Mindscape	8.64
2	Panzer General	SSI/Mindscape	8.38
3	Tanks	SSI	7.51
4	Close Combat	Microsoft	7.50
5	Battleground: Gettysburg	Talonsoft	7.47
6	Custer's Last Command	Incredible Simulations	7.38
7	Stalingrad	Avalon Hill	7.28
8	Perfect General II	QQP	7.08
9	Allied General	SSI/Mindscape	7.03
10	TacOps for Windows	Arsenal	6.77

Reader Poll #144

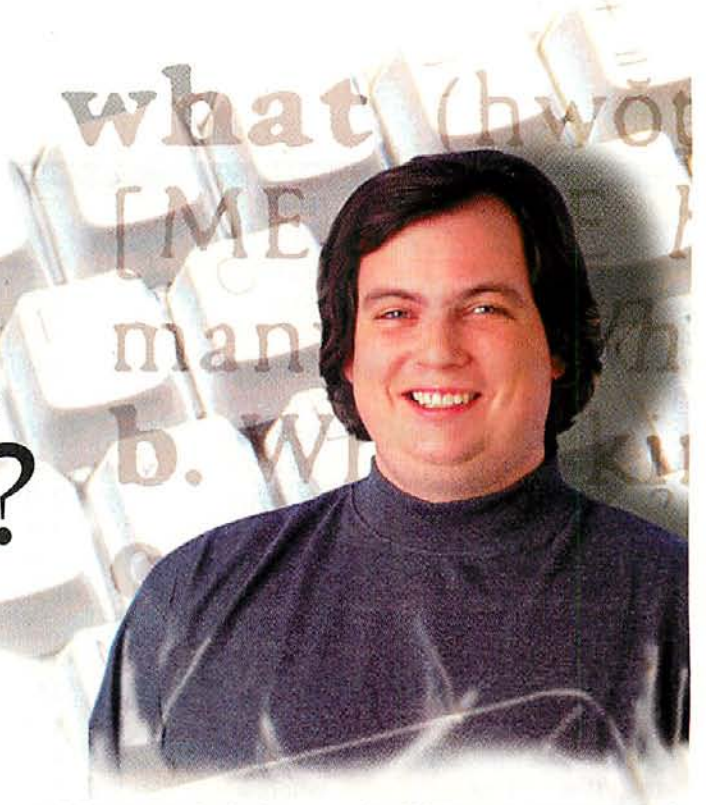
	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
★ 1	WarCraft II	Blizzard	ST	9.01
2	WarCraft II Expansion Set	Blizzard	ST	8.97
3	Civilization II	MicroProse	ST	8.88
★ 4	Wing Commander IV	EA/Origin	SI	8.72
★ 5	Duke Nukem 3-D	Apogee/FormGen	AC	8.66
★ 6	Steel Panthers	SSI/Mindscape	WG	8.64
7	Command & Conquer	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.59
8	C & C: Covert Operations	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.56
9	Mechwarrior 2	Activision	SI	8.45
10	AH-64 Longbow	EA/Origin	SI	8.39
11	Panzer General	SSI/Mindscape	WG	8.38
★ 12	Gabriel Knight 2	Sierra	AD	8.37
13	Wing Commander 3	EA/Origin	SI	8.34
14	Crusader: No Remorse	EA/Origin	AC	8.33
15	Heroes of Might & Magic	New World Computing	ST	8.15
16	Advanced Tactical Fighters	EA	SI	8.14
★ 17	NHL Hockey 96	EA Sports	SP	8.13
	EF2000	Ocean	SI	8.13
19	Master of Magic	MicroProse	ST	8.09
★ 20	You Don't Know Jack	Berkeley Systems	CP	8.08
21	Silent Hunter	SSI/Mindscape	SI	8.03
22	Zork Nemesis	Activision	AD	8.02
23	Flt Commander 2: Mission Builder	Avalon Hill	WG	8.00
	Spycraft	Activision	AD	8.00
	U-Boat II: Drumbeat	Deadly Games	SI	8.00
26	U.S. Marine Fighters	EA	SI	7.94
27	Dark Forces	LucasArts	AC	7.90
28	Doom II	id Software	AC	7.88
29	System Shock	EA/Origin	AC	7.87
30	WarCraft	Blizzard	ST	7.82
31	Jagged Alliance	Sir-Tech	ST	7.80
	Descent II	Interplay	AC	7.80
33	Nascar Racing	Papyrus	SI	7.79
34	FPS Football Pro 96	Sierra	SP	7.74
35	Mission Critical	Legend	AD	7.71
36	NBA Live '95	EA Sports	SP	7.70
37	The Need For Speed	EA	AC	7.69
	Tony LaRussa 3 '96	Stormfront Studios	SP	7.69
39	CivNet	MicroProse	ST	7.66
	Warlords II Deluxe	SSG	ST	7.66
	X-Com: Terror From The Deep	MicroProse	ST	7.66
42	Hexen	id/Raven	AC	7.65
43	PGA Tour Golf 486	EA Sports	SP	7.64
44	Wings of Glory	EA/Origin	SI	7.63
45	Earthworm Jim: Can O' Worms	Playmates Interactive	AC	7.62
★	Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen	New World Computing	RP	7.62
47	NBA Live '96	EA Sports	SP	7.61
48	U.S. Navy Fighters	EA	SI	7.57
49	Fantasy General	SSI/Mindscape	ST	7.55
50	Anvil of Dawn	New World Computing	RP	7.51

	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
	Tanks	SSI/Mindscape	WG	7.51
52	Close Combat	Microsoft	WG	7.50
	Full Throttle	LucasArts	AD	7.50
54	Battleground: Gettysburg	Talonsoft	WG	7.47
55	FPS Football 95	Sierra	SP	7.46
56	Warhammer	Mindscape	ST	7.42
	SimCity CD-Rom	Maxis	ST	7.42
58	Virtual Pool	Interplay	SP	7.38
	Custer's Last Command	Incredible Simulations	WG	7.38
60	Magic Carpet 2	EA/Bullfrog	AC	7.37
61	Phantasmagoria	Sierra	AD	7.37
62	The Dig	LucasArts	AD	7.36
63	Under A Killing Moon	Access	AD	7.33
64	Hyper 3D Pinball	Virgin	AC	7.32
65	Stalingrad	Avalon Hill	WG	7.28
66	Terra Nova: Strike Force Centauri	Looking Glass	AC	7.26
67	Hardball 5	Accolade	SP	7.25
	1942 Pacific Air War Gold	MicroProse	SI	7.25
69	Riddle of Master Lu	Sanctuary Woods	AD	7.24
70	Conquest of the New World	Interplay	ST	7.23
	Incredible Toons	Sierra	CP	7.23
72	Heretic	id/Raven	AC	7.22
73	Caesar II	Sierra	ST	7.21
	Ripper	Take 2	AD	7.21
75	Stonekeep	Interplay	RP	7.18
76	Aces of the Deep	Sierra	SI	7.16
	Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	CP	7.16
78	Star Trek: TNG, Final Unity	Spectrum HoloByte	AD	7.14
79	Destruction Derby	Psygnosis	AC	7.09
80	Perfect General II	QQP	WG	7.08
81	Flight Unlimited	Looking Glass	SI	7.07
82	Allied General	SSI/Mindscape	WG	7.03
83	Relentless	EA	AD	7.01
84	F. Thomas Big Hurt Baseball	Acclaim	SP	7.00
	Rayman	Ubisoft	AC	7.00
86	Legends of Kyrandia 3	Virgin/Westwood	AD	6.95
87	Flight Commander 2	Avalon Hill	WG	6.94
	Ravenloft: Stone Prophet	SSI/Mindscape	RP	6.94
89	Apache	Interactive Magic	SI	6.91
	Descent	Interplay	AC	6.91
91	Earthsiege 2	Sierra	SI	6.88
92	Chronomaster	Intracorp	AD	6.86
	Tritryst	Virgin	CP	6.86
94	FPS Baseball 94	Sierra	SP	6.82
	SU-27 Flanker	SSI/Mindscape	SI	6.82
	Magic Carpet	EA/Bullfrog	AC	6.82
	Future Shock	Bethesda	AC	6.82
98	The Dark Eye	Inscape	AD	6.80
99	Monopoly	Virgin/Westwood	CP	6.77
	Death Gate	Legend	AD	6.77

Games on unnumbered lines have scores equal to the line above. ★ = Top game of type, Red = New Game, AD = Adventure, RP = Role Playing, SI = Simulation/ Space Combat, ST = Strategy, WG = Wargame, AC = Action, SP = Sports, CP = Classic/Puzzle. Games are retired after two years and become eligible for the Hall of Fame.

MARTIN CIRULIS

What's The Deal With... Net Games?



It's hard to believe that just a short couple of years have passed since I started griping about the lack of multiplayer games. There are enough connectable titles now that I can start getting picky about them.

In the beginning, it was enough just to be able to battle other human beings in strategic or action venues, a much-needed alternative to the shoddy state of computer opponents. Unfortunately, I think too many designers have become fixated on the "Deathmatch" aspect of some action games. These are almost always fun, but many games are not detailed enough to keep this activity interesting for any length of time—though legions of psychotic NUKEM and QUAKE warriors tend to prove me wrong by knocking each other around night after night on the Internet. RISE OF THE TRIAD did an excellent job of providing special levels for grudge matches, but no matter how ornate they were, without any targets other than a handful of human players, they got boring. Just calculating the body count ceases to satisfy after a while. Even hard-core gamers often desire purpose, objectives and accomplishment within their virtual worlds. Strategy game designers seem to have caught on to this idea, and COMMAND & CONQUER, WARCRAFT II and CIVNET all allow you to mix human and computer opponents, with varying degrees of success.

The real issue is whether designers make networking an organic part of their games—or whether they try to tack it on at the end as a gimmick, or more innocently, leave it until the end of the programming period, in case they are behind schedule and need to drop an "option." While I was happy enough to accept these last two scenarios during the birthing years of net gaming, I think the time has come to be a little more discerning. I would really like to see the end of that little note on boxes saying that the net or modem capability advertised isn't quite ready, and if you'll just send in your registration card, they'll have it for you in a month or so. ZEPHYR and WARHAMMER: SHADOW OF THE HORNED RAT might both have been received better by the market if multiplayer capabilities had been integral to their designs.

The two companies that seem to understand gamers' desire for more variety in multiplayer play are Bullfrog and Blizzard, both of which seem to have a solid commitment to creating games with the social aspect incorporated from the ground up. On the action/combat front, if Bullfrog is successful in bringing together two very ambitious designs, they will at the very least put themselves firmly in the forefront of the industry—and possibly score an upset against those id kids. DUNGEONKEEPER could revolutionize the whole multiuser dungeon scene, in much the same way that the first graphic adventures made text-based games obsolete nearly overnight. But to be honest, the Froggie title I am most looking forward to is THE INDESTRUCTIBLES, a networkable, first-person view superhero game, which promises to be the ultimate in *Champions*-esque software titles. I can't think of a game with longer legs than one that will let you design your own superhero and wander about a dynamic urban environment, knocking bad guys through walls or whacking friends around with broken-off telephone poles. Just think of all the Hulk vs. Superman arguments to be solved!

> **"The best multiplay games are those where network play is integral to their design."**

On the more cerebral side, Blizzard seems committed to strategy games in which human opponents are part of the initial design concept. Their WARCRAFT2 is a real treat to play, and a worthy technological successor to the original WARCRAFT (a game limited only by the fact it was restricted to head-to-head play). It may well be that DIABLO will open up multiplayer fantasy gaming to an even greater degree.

Right now, the industry seems to be on the cusp, and is evolving into a more dynamic, popular form of social entertainment, with many developers taking advantage of Windows 95's built-in networking and the Internet itself. Unfortunately, there is also a drive to get the most gimmick for the buck, and multiplayer capacity is still lumped in with features like SVGA-rendered backdrops and exploding body parts and tacked on at the end of product development—if there's still time in the fiscal quarter. If computer gaming is to become a truly social activity, gamers (and reviewers, for that matter), need to demand more challenging variety in play, as well as rich, dynamic universes where our virtual entities can make a real difference. It's no longer enough to accept the same old games tarted up with some last-minute bells and whistles.

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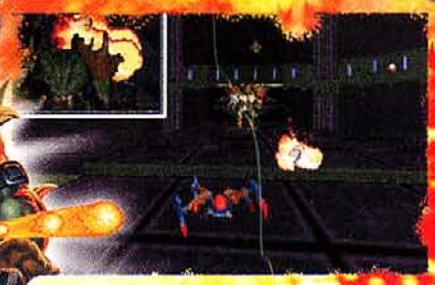


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Kill your competitors, steal their secrets, headhunt their best men, and mow down everyone who stands in your way.

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